

Further Education Policy and Context:

The relationship between curriculum middle
managers' leadership practice and quality
improvement

Fazal Dad

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Abstract

This research contributes to a body of well established, albeit typically anecdotal, understanding across the UK further education sector that suggests there are significant limitations regarding the effectiveness of curriculum middle managers' leadership practice.

If further education provision is to keep up with or exceed expectations from industry, government inspections and other stakeholders, then a deeper more evidence-based understanding of this pivotal role is needed. This includes an assessment of motivating factors that drive-up effectiveness in the role, as well as an exploration of the barriers faced in practice. Ultimately, the work presents initiatives, which aim to best release the full potential of those in this role. It can be argued that finding ways to unlock this potential is of national importance.

The impact of government intervention and financial constraints has created further impetus for FE colleges to increase efficiency and to reduce costs. Curriculum middle managers are both policy implementers and change makers and it is argued in this study that curriculum middle managers have the most difficult and challenging job within a further education college.

The success of the role of the curriculum middle manager and their leadership practice is therefore critical in a college's ability to realise its two most important strategic outcomes. Firstly, that a college operates with financial efficacy, and secondly that ongoing quality improvement in teaching, learning and assessment results in high student success rates, which are recognised by external stakeholders such as Ofsted.

This research follows a constructivist research methodology framed within an interpretive hermeneutic. Focusing upon a detailed case study of a medium-size further education college, it utilises empirical data primarily derived from semi-structured interviews, documentary material and field observation of 14 curriculum middle managers. Particular attention is paid in the study to the key role of the curriculum middle manager in raising standards of teaching, learning and assessment to improve student success rates, whilst having to operate within an environment of increasing challenge and austerity.

The findings derived from the experiences of curriculum middle managers suggest that, i) curriculum middle managers are having to operate at a relentless pace to meet unrealistic expectations, ii) senior managers are operating a top-down communication strategy with very little consideration of the feedback from curriculum middle managers, iii) curriculum middle managers experience a lack of meaningful staff development training when appointed and no training needs analysis is undertaken to support newly appointed curriculum middle managers and, most importantly, iv) the wealth of teaching and learning knowledge, expertise and experience is very often not embraced by the senior managers when new strategies are devised to improve the student experience.

The findings suggest that senior managers have a significant role to play in supporting curriculum middle managers and ensuring that these individuals are fully valued and that their expertise is embedded within a culture of true consultation in order to energise and release the inherent potential within the role. Conclusions identify a range of practical considerations and examples for senior managers and further education leadership to consider in order to help address this phenomenon. The findings explore future implications for policy and practice within the further education sector, and for the related theoretical literature, along with suggestions for further research.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The further education (FE) sector in England over the last five years has seen two significant landscape changes. During this period, the sector has needed to reshape itself to justify its existence in light of its contribution to the economy and the austerity measures imposed by the government. Furthermore, the government's key aim to ensure qualifications being delivered in further education colleges directly contribute to students gaining meaningful employment or higher levels of training, has resulted in a radical reduction in qualifications being funded by the government:

'If this country is to have a vibrant and growing economy, it is vital that our education and skills system helps and encourages people to acquire new competencies and abilities and to develop further those they have. Vocational qualifications play an important part in this. At their best, they both communicate an individual's competencies in a clear and reliable way and can act as signposts for the progress he or she has made. However, a vocational qualification system, which is confusing or contained qualifications of doubtful value, will not deliver these benefits'
Hancock, Minister for Enterprise and Skills (March 2014 p1).

This has culminated in colleges having to radically change their curriculum portfolio to meet funding requirements or consider merging with other further education colleges to be financially viable. The other significant change has been the concentrated effort by the government to raise the standards of teaching and learning in colleges. Ofsted are charged by government with the responsibility of assuring the standards of education in colleges. Colleges are inspected cyclically resulting in an overall performance grade according to a four-point scale, resulting in colleges being graded Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement or Inadequate. This has resulted in many colleges being graded *Requires Improvement* or *Inadequate*. For example, over ten outstanding colleges have lost their status under the new Ofsted Handbook during the period of September 2012 to July 2015.

'If education is the key to unlocking the well-being and prosperity of our nation, then our future success rests in the hands of great leaders. Such leaders know how to use increased freedoms to bring about the transformation that children and learners need'. Sir Michael Wilshaw - Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (June 2015).

It can be argued from Sir Michael Wilshaw's (2015) comments that the government continues to reinforce the importance of educational leader's role in raising standards of education to ensure learners' potential is fully exploited, resulting in future success being secured. In March 2015, the Association of colleges (AoC) reinforced the government's position by reminding college governing bodies and senior post holders that responsibility and accountability of raising standards of teaching and learning must be a top priority for the educational organisation.

Furthermore, in April 2014 the government further strengthened its quality improvement arm by introducing a Further Education (FE) Commissioner to provide independent advice to Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) on the progress of colleges in difficulties. The introduction of the FE Commissioner resulted in a new process being implemented to eradicate poor leadership and management of colleges.

The oversight of this process has been the responsibility of the Further Education (FE) Commissioner who has powers to remove a board of governors and senior management teams if no progress is made by the college. The Further Education Commissioner reports into the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS). These significant changes have been a substantial contributory factor in colleges having to review how senior management teams effectively raise performance. Ultimately, this performance is measured in how management and leadership is able to raise the standards of teaching and learning, consolidate support services, introduce performance management processes to eradicate poor teaching and critically review staff development activities. Now that these changes are being implemented nationally, their impact will be explored within this study. Additional changes are planned which will further challenge the sector to consider structural changes. For example, from September 2015 all students who are enrolled at a further education college in England must study GCSE maths and English if they have not achieved a grade C. In addition, the

introduction of college league tables (from September 2017) for Levels 2 and 3 qualifications is set to inform students, parents and employers of the best performing colleges and this may well require colleges to further reduce curriculum portfolios to eradicate low performing qualifications. Should delivery go ahead to take on board these emerging challenges, then staff recruitment and training would be significant factors in preparing for effective delivery and success. This further emphasises the need for skilful and particularly responsive, successful college leadership practice.

The aim of this work is to examine, through a case study approach, the degree to which current changes in leadership responsibility are shaping both the demands made on curriculum middle managers and how this might affect their actual practice, with a particular focus around the impact these managers make in attempting to secure quality improvements.

Firstly, it is important that this study is able to set out and clarify definitions. The chapter then further explores the context of the study, the current state of research around the practice of middle managers, and the philosophical position of the researcher (influenced as it is by the occupational role of a senior leader within further education).

1.2 Definitions

College Academic Middle Managers - For the purposes of this study the term 'middle managers' will be defined as first tier academic managers within the further education (FE) sector i.e. curriculum middle managers. These managers' report to senior managers and also manage groups of staff themselves (which includes full-time and part-time teachers and support staff). The composition of staff group to manage typically consists of eight full-time and ten part-time teaching staff.

Effective leadership – For the purpose of this case study, the performance criteria framework for effective leadership have been embraced, as set out in the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework (CIF) handbook (2012). The criteria for effective leadership in the framework not only satisfy Ofsted regarding the quality of leadership they find in colleges, they are also for the most part validated by international research evidence about educational leadership (see for example Robinson *et al.* 2007).

From the Ofsted handbook (2012), performance criteria for effective leadership are that college managers:

- Demonstrate an ambitious vision, have high expectations for what all learners can achieve, and attain high standards of quality and performance.
- Improve teaching and learning through rigorous performance management and appropriate professional development.
- Evaluate the quality of the provision through robust self-assessment, taking account of users' views, and use the findings to promote and develop capacity for sustainable improvement.
- Successfully plan, establish and manage the curriculum and learning programmes to meet the needs and interests of learners, employers and the local and national community.
- Actively promote equality and diversity, tackle bullying and discrimination, and narrow the achievement gap.
- Safeguard all learners.

A systematic meta-analysis of schools-based research by Robinson *et al.* (2007) identified five key factors of effective leadership, and ranked them according to effect size:

- Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development (ES 0.84).
- Planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum (ES 0.42).
- Establishing goals and expectations (ES 0.35).
- Strategic resourcing (ES 0.34).
- Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment (ES 0.27) (Robinson *et al.* 2007 p39).

By far the most important factor according to this research is active participation by leaders in the professional learning and development of their staff.

‘There is a clear powerful correlation that leaders who promote and participate in teachers’ professional learning have a focus on teaching and learning, learn more about what teachers are up against and give them more support in making changes required to embed their learning in the daily practice and have a deeper appreciation of the stages and duration of the change process’ (Robinson *et al.* 2007 p92).

This argument by Robinson is further supported by an Ofsted report ‘The Logical Chain: Continuing Professional Development in Effective Schools’ (2006). This report describes the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) arrangements as a logical chain of procedures, which identify organisational and staff needs. The report highlights that many schools have a well-planned CPD system for staff, which embraces a variety of activities involving support staff alongside teachers, monitoring progress and evaluating impact of the CPD. However, the key findings of this report found CPD to be most effective in schools where the senior managers fully understood the connections between each link in the chain and recognise the potential of CPD for raising standards of teaching and learning. As a result, therefore, such senior managers gave CPD a central role in planning for improvement. The key to this success was that CPD activity was effectively designed and integrated into school improvement plans. Furthermore, each link in the chain was scrupulously managed to achieve the intended outcomes and

these outcomes were then meticulously evaluated in order to inform the next cycle of planning.

The findings of these two reports clearly demonstrate the need for senior managers and middle managers within the further education sector to robustly manage staff development activities to ensure organisational quality improvement plans are met. Furthermore, the need to evaluate CPD activities to measure impact is critical to demonstrate a return on investment and a tangible outcome. Too often staff development activities are a generic carpet bombing exercise to satisfy statutory training requirements (for example Safeguarding or Equality and Diversity). In addition, the focus given to the staff development process needs to be a central plank of activity to raise standards of teaching and learning. Colleges in recent years have introduced performance management processes; however, there is a shortfall in linking staff development activities to impact measurement in line with an organisational quality improvement agenda. The key to this success will be (as Ofsted describe) every link in the chain scrupulously managing their part of the process to inform the next cycle of planning. The key stakeholder to the success of any staff development activities in a college environment is the middle manager who is in one instance informing the strategic agenda and on the other hand implementing change to achieve organisational improvement objectives.

1.3 Quality improvements

Quality factors in FE colleges naturally focus on teaching and learning. Key indicators for the quality of teaching and learning include student achievement, lesson observation outcomes and student destinations. Provision can be said to be of good quality when most students make the necessary progress in their learning to meet the entry requirements for the next step in their education or training. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) stated:

‘The FE system – the colleges and training providers that teach vocational qualifications and skills – needs to guarantee students high quality

teaching and courses to help students into jobs or university and create the skilled workforce employers need' (December 2012 p2).

Therefore, quality improvement in an FE college is any activity on the part of college leaders, which results in an increase in the chances of students progressing onto higher-level courses or into jobs, commensurate with the skills and knowledge they have acquired during their FE education.

Factors identified by Cordingley *et al.* (2008) in curriculum design and enactment for which there is evidence they are likely to promote learning include:

- Establishing and building on learners' starting points.
- Helping learners make connections with real world contexts.
- Organising learning through collaboration and structured dialogue
- Establishing respectful relationships between teacher and students and between students themselves
- Teachers' excellent subject knowledge
- Aligning teaching to desired outcomes
- Opportunities to revisit learning
- A focus on engaging student interest
- Teacher as enquirer (Cordingley *et al.* 2008 p9)

The above list provides fundamental foundations to good or outstanding teaching and correlates to the Ofsted handbook when identifying learners' outcomes.

Ofsted grade characteristics to support good or outstanding learner outcomes include:

- Learners and groups of learners are achieving very well and are making better than expected progress given their starting points.
- Learners acquire knowledge and understanding quickly that will prepare them well for the next stage in their education, training or employment.

- They develop and apply a good range of skills well, including personal social skills, English, mathematics and functional skills and practical vocational skills.
- Success rates of the large majority of groups of learners are likely to be in line with or above similar groups of learners nationally (Ofsted 2012 p43).

The combination of Cordingley *et al.* (2008) factors in curriculum design and the Ofsted 2012 handbook criteria for grading outstanding and good learner outcomes reinforce the importance of curriculum design at the outset being fit for purpose and closely aligned with intended outcomes for learners.

In both Cordingley *et al.* (2008) and the Ofsted 2012 Handbook, curriculum design and outcome criteria are intrinsically linked to ensure students receive a meaningful educational programme with tangible outcomes. The input to curriculum design and meaningful outcomes, which are measured by Ofsted, are the responsibility of curriculum middle managers. Therefore, the accountability for practice and effective leadership is critical to meet student expectations and external stakeholder interests. Page (2011) argues that too often the role of curriculum middle managers is neglected, despite their pivotal status as the final implementers of change. The current situation in which the further education sector finds itself supports Page's argument; the financial constraints in which the sector now has to operate and the sharp focus on quality improvements no longer allow organisations to neglect curriculum middle managers or allow such managers to coast along.

1.4 The current policy and workplace context for middle managers in FE

Since the mid-1990s, the FE sector in England has experienced far-reaching changes in the way the sector operates and additional measures have been introduced to increase accountability. This has resulted in the FE sector having to radically change its approach to operate in a far more business-like manner, so as to position itself as financially viable and at the same time ensure quality

improvement measures are delivering high performance (as measured by learner success rates) to meet government targets. For example, funding systems have changed on a yearly basis; this has resulted in a reduction in adult funding for five consecutive years by 25% and the introduction of 24+ loans for adults who wish to study Level 2 or 3 vocational programmes of study. This is a significant change in government funding policy for the further education sector.

The government's intended outcome of this change is to ensure colleges provide education and training programmes that meet both market demand and customer needs. External accountability has widened and Ofsted inspection processes tend to reflect government policy of the day, resulting in continuous change in performance measurement criteria. The introduction of the FE Commissioner is another measure, now able to intervene where colleges lack financial viability or fail to improve quality standards, falling short of the minimum standards of performance expected based on national success rates. The impact of these changes has seen an increasingly sharp scrutiny of senior and middle managers' leadership by internal and external stakeholders and quality assurance systems. For example, during the last three years a number of colleges graded as *Inadequate* or *Requires Improvement* have seen the senior management team removed from the college by the FE Commissioner's intervention processes. This has resulted in the middle managers' role being further scrutinised by Ofsted inspectors for its effectiveness to address underperformance.

During the journey of this case study, two sets of governments have continued to shape and influence what they require from the further education sector. Under the Labour government during the period of 1998-2010, the further education sector was targeted to deliver high-volumes of Level 2 and 3 qualifications to equip the workforce with appropriate qualifications. These qualifications were not targeted to reflect demand from industry or commerce. For example, colleges were being encouraged to proactively pursue 19+ learners in work who were not qualified. This led to many colleges maximising their finances by establishing large cohorts of workforce in employment who required to be accredited for their

occupation. In addition, the government targeted 50% of the workforce to be qualified to a Level 5 qualification.

The new coalition government in 2011 announced that the further education sector for the next five years would experience significant financial cutbacks to reflect the fiscal position of the economy. However, the government also announced greater freedoms and flexibility for the sector; this reflected the government's acknowledgement that a top-down, targets driven FE and skills sector is not effective. This was outlined in a government policy paper titled; *New Chances and New Challenges Further Education and Skills System Reform Plan: Building a World-Class System* (December 2011). The government was committed to free colleges and training organisations from central control and regulation in order to ensure providers are more able to respond to the needs of their learners, employers and communities. This approach was based on the government's trust in the sector's leadership and staff and their proven track record in raising performance. The key outcome from the government's perspective from this change was to give colleges and training organisations the space to operate in a market environment and respond more effectively to the needs of their customers. To ensure quality was maintained, providers offering excellence in learning experiences would only receive minimal external scrutiny and intervention, however, to protect public funding and interests of learners, poor providers would receive greater external scrutiny and will be required to make rapid improvements or risk losing funding for the provision. These are providers who are graded by Ofsted as *Requiring Improvement* or *Inadequate*, and are rated as inadequate for financial health or control.

In addition to these changes, the government reform plan targeted the following areas:

1. Funding policy changes to simplify funding rates and minimum contract values (£0.5 million minimum turnover) – this has resulted in a number of private providers having to merge with large colleges to continue providing

training. Furthermore, the simplified funding rates ensured the government drive to reduce rates per learner was transparent.

2. Outward accountability – the expectation is that employers and learners need to contribute to the co-design of the skills offer and that providers demonstrate a greater accountability to their community. The *Local Enterprise Partnerships* (LEPs) are seen as the engine room in ensuring that government investment in skills meets the priorities of the local economy and enable communities to prosper. The composition of such boards includes large employers, small and medium enterprises from the private sector, local public sector representatives reflecting education, health, business and commerce.

All future capital project funding bids by colleges are scrutinised and approved by the local enterprise partnerships. For example, a college pursuing a new build or investment in an engineering workshop is now scrutinised by the Local Enterprise Partnership Board. This significant change to capital funding projects demonstrates a more collaborative approach to reflect a local and national need and removes the risk of duplication of resources.

3. The simplification of administration and reduction in burden – in light of significant cutbacks within the *Department of Education* (DoE), colleges are no longer pursued for relentless data regarding learners. Many systems for reporting back to the DoE have been abolished and replaced with automated data return processes. For example, each month the college provides information on student numbers for apprenticeships; this determines the college income received for this training and payment is based on actual data. The positive impact of this is that colleges can generate additional income, however, if college apprenticeship numbers are not reflecting planned activity this results in income that only reflects actual numbers. This has resulted in a number of providers of

apprenticeship programmes experiencing significant financial problems, resulting in mergers and acquisitions.

4. Competition in further education (FE) – the government wishes to further open the further education market to private providers. It can be argued that this rationale is based on a private sector business approach not being adopted within the further education sector. This was reinforced during the annual Association of Colleges (AoC) conference 2015 when the Minister for Business, Innovation and Skills, challenged the leaders of further education colleges on the private sector delivering over 67% of the apprenticeship provision across the country. During the 2013 AoC conference, Chief Executive Martin Dole informed senior college managers and governors of the further education sector that there is a need for the sector to change. This is in order to recognise that the landscape within the further education sector now demands a business style organisational approach to meet government policy and student demand. This message was further reinforced by the Business Innovation & Skills Secretary, Vince Cable, in that the government’s agenda is to drive down costs of training learners. Ministers have stated that the further education sector needs to change to embrace the challenges the country is experiencing. For example, “more for less” whilst improving quality of teaching and learning, and not relying on government funding as a sole means of income.

5. Teaching and learning – within this reform plan, the government have tasked college governors to take an active part in the monitoring of teaching and learning. This is now reflected when a college is inspected by Ofsted. Inspectors are keen to review governance monitoring processes and how these challenge the senior management team of a college to raise standards of teaching and learning.

6. Community learning – for many years the government have provided funding to ensure community learning takes place without the need to focus on qualification outcomes. In the reform plan, the government is tasking colleges to generate income from the communities to pay for this provision. This has resulted in many community-learning activities no longer being offered due to the lack of appetite for individuals to pay for such learning.

7. Creating a diverse and responsive sector – the government is openly encouraging the further education sector to develop new delivery models and take advantage of opportunities in the global market. This has resulted in a number of colleges focusing on international business to generate additional income. Early indications however show a low level of engagement overseas.

These significant changes have forced many further education institutions to carefully review their role in providing post-16 education. Reflecting over the last six years in particular, educational reforms have seen the entire landscape change. For example, the introduction of compulsory education or training being extended from the age of 16 to 18 years old; vocational qualifications only being funded if they are validated by employers or universities; the introduction of study programmes for all full time students; all students must continue studying GCSE maths and English if they have not achieved grade C or above; colleges to be financially penalised if students are not studying GCSE level maths and English; 18+ learners only to be funded for 450 teaching hours; performance league tables being introduced at Level 3 to establish a parity of esteem between A-level qualifications and vocational qualifications; Ofsted now critically focusing on the learning taking place in the classroom or workplace instead of student success rates, to name only a few.

Linked to this final point, Ofsted cannot award the highest-grade outstanding overall if the teaching and learning aspect grade is not outstanding. Therefore,

teaching and learning is the “deal breaker” for an educational organisation to successfully negotiate an Ofsted inspection.

Furthermore, Ofsted will scrutinise the institution’s curriculum portfolio to reflect local economy workforce demands to ensure learners are on programmes of study, which will lead to meaningful jobs, or higher levels of training reflecting a local and national workforce demand. The government continues to review qualifications annually and over the last five years has removed funding for over four and half thousand qualifications. These qualifications from the government’s perspective no longer contribute to the economy or there is little or no demand from employers.

The government in April 2013 published a paper titled *Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills*. This paper’s main objective was to robustly address underperformance in the further education sector. Within this paper the FE sector were informed that intervention processes would be implemented to tackle any underperformance. Following the introduction of a *Further Education (FE) Commissioner* in April 2014, there was a significant shift in policy and practice to hold colleges accountable for an inadequate Ofsted inspection, failure to meet national minimum standards of performance set by the Department of Education and, an inadequate assessment for financial health or financial management and control.

The key role of the FE Commissioner is to provide independent advice to the Minister for Skills and Enterprise and the Chief Executives of the funding agencies regarding the capacity and capability of existing governance and leadership to deliver rapid and sustainable improvement. While the FE Commissioner does not hold any statutory powers, recommendations can be made (subject to evidence), that the college or institution be placed in ‘administered college’ status. This would then lead to possible changes to the governing body, the leadership team of the college being removed or even its closure. For example, the early work undertaken by the Commissioner has

resulted in a number of college Principals and governing bodies being asked to resign and a number of colleges to consider merging with other educational institutions to ensure financial viability.

The impact of these changes has resulted in senior and middle managers having their leadership scrutinised by internal and external stakeholders. This has in turn resulted in a number of colleges considering Federation arrangements, shared services and the reshaping of their curriculum offer. The financial constraints have brought about a radical reduction in adult provision and adults being asked to pay or take out student loans to support their programme of studies. In addition, many colleges have downsized senior management teams in order to embrace their newly found fiscal constraints.

1.5 Curriculum middle managers

Government policies and funding cuts have resulted in the curriculum middle manager's role becoming increasingly important and pivotal within the further education sector. Curriculum middle managers have to operate what O'Leary and Smith (2012 p3) describe as a 'private sector managerialist' approach. Their remit is to bring about curriculum change and raise standards of teaching and learning (not least because they are required to fill the gap left by a reduction in senior and middle management posts providing support services). The financial constraints on further education colleges have resulted in many replacement management posts being scrutinised for impact and outcomes. These challenges for curriculum middle managers are unprecedented. Many curriculum middle managers have not worked or operated under such funding constraints. However, there has been a clear tendency for middle managers to embrace additional responsibilities for example, being given greater autonomy to develop new programmes and bringing about quality improvement.

Interest in and research relating to the constant flux of change within the FE sector is limited (Simkins and Lumby 2002; Briggs 2003). The work of Gleeson

and Shain (1999), Briggs (2005), and Gleeson and Knights (2008), offer a brief insight into the role of the middle managers within colleges of FE. However, the studies fail to explore some important issues regarding the complexity of middle management roles, and their ability to bring about quality improvements in a context of change and uncertainty. Their findings tend to focus on the general issues regarding the work and role of middle management. In particular, academic middle managers being mediators of change, (Gleeson and Shain 1999), the polarisation of values between managers and lecturers, (Simkins and Lumby 2002) and the reluctance of middle managers to become leaders because of the risk that their own autonomy be eroded, (Gleeson and Knights 2008). While the researcher accepts that these studies provide meaningful and relevant findings for the topics they consider, the literature within these studies does not explore the impact of middle managers' engagement in raising the standards of teaching and learning leading to improved learner outcomes and success.

This case study scrutinises the role of curriculum middle managers in the light of change within a performance focused FE sector. In doing so, this research investigates the leadership practice of a group of managers in a medium size FE college as they seek to bring about quality improvements. This study aims to provide information to inform future policy and practice in the FE sector, suggesting ways in which the effectiveness of college leadership can be enhanced.

The role of middle managers is critical to secure the overall success of the organisation, positioned as they are at the interface between senior managers and lecturers. As stated earlier, the role of a curriculum middle manager is becoming ever more critical in implementing policy change and in understanding the requirements of how best to bring about quality, improvement in teaching and learning, whilst managing full-time and part-time teaching staff to address underperformance. These challenges have resulted in college human resource departments having to strengthen their communication skills with all staff and

provide training and support for curriculum middle managers to manage those staff, which may be judged as incompetent.

Furthermore, too often senior managers expect quick fixes for example; select your best lecturer to run a department or section. From the direct experience of the researcher, this may be fraught with many problems for example, lecturers are told that this is an ideal opportunity for personal development but with no consideration of any agreed development programme for the staff member. Furthermore, the concept and the assumption made by senior college managers that lecturers are natural managers, appears to be based on tradition rather than on actual staff competence.

In addition, experience of working as a curriculum middle manager within the FE sector has led to a belief that there is a lack of understanding and consistency on the subject of the overall purpose of the middle manager role and the nature of their responsibilities. In some instances, this has resulted in tension and lack of clarification between senior managers and middle managers. For example, strategic decisions have been made at senior management level but have failed to materialise in the classroom when liaising with teachers. This then questions the practice and effectiveness of the curriculum middle manager.

1.6 Current state of research on the role of middle managers in FE

Previous studies around the role of middle managers have failed to address the key question that this study aims to address: to examine the degree to which current changes in leadership responsibility are shaping both the demands made upon curriculum middle managers and how this might affect their actual practice. Too often, other studies (Briggs 2003; Lumby 2003; Wise 1999) have simply generalised and defined roles and expectations of middle managers. While these are important determinants, the current culture within the sector has seen wholesale changes in the light of government initiatives to raise standards and attainment levels. This has resulted in many colleges embarking on middle

manager professional development programmes to support current staff in these posts. Very often middle managers have been promoted from teaching positions to a management post with little or no management experience. Gleeson and Knights (2008) argue this to be the case in the further education sector in England. This has resulted in many outstanding lecturers being removed from frontline teaching. In addition, large pockets of middle managers have initially struggled to embrace the management role.

As well as comparing existing research in this area, this study will contribute to the ongoing academic debate surrounding leadership. Many academic writers accept that defining leadership is a complex and challenging task, however, there is general consensus that the nature and importance of leadership is imperative to achievement and in raising morale in the workforce, across politics, private and public sectors, business and in many other aspects of life.

Academics have contributed a plethora of leadership models or theories, which only further confuse the leadership debate and raise more questions than they provide answers for, which in turn, leads to further research. To cite a few examples: Warren Bennis and Bert Nanus (1985) state that 'each theory provides a sliver of insight but remains an incomplete and wholly inadequate exploration of leadership' and Gary Yukl (2010 p493-494) described the field of leadership as having been 'in a state of ferment and confusion for decades'.

Roger Gill (2006 p1) argues that 'Leadership is a hot topic. Yet students find that while the literature is plentiful, it is also fragmented'.

Stephen Zaccaro and Richard Klimoski (2001 p414) concur that the leadership debate amongst scholars is still incomplete and confusing: 'leadership literature still appears disconnected and directionless. A major cause of the state of the field is that many studies of leadership are context free; that is, low consideration is given to organisational variables that influence the nature and impact of leadership.'

This study also seeks to address the shortfall identified by Stephen Zaccaro and Richard Klimoski (2001) that 'leadership research needs to take account of context if the characteristics of effective leadership are to be properly understood'. Currently there is little in the form of research detailing the influences that college middle managers may understand affect their leadership practice and how this might impact upon quality improvement.

1.7 Research aims and objectives

This study aims to examine the degree to which the relationship between curriculum middle managers' leadership practice and quality improvement are shaping both the demands made on curriculum middle managers and how this might affect their actual practice. It investigates the leadership responsibility of middle managers in one FE college. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- Critically review the international literature to identify core strands and themes of effective leadership practice in education.
- Situate the study in the context of a single college, a dynamic, challenging and changing English FE sector, and appropriate leadership theory.
- Clarify the role of curriculum middle managers and their leadership practice and quality improvement in a college setting (and the implications for effective academic leadership).
- Capture curriculum middle managers' perceptions of leadership through semi-structured interviews, and reflective practice.
- Explore the implications of the study for future policy and practice in the FE sector and suggest ways in which the effectiveness of college leadership can be enhanced.
- Relate the findings back to the theoretical literature.

These objectives address a general lack of clarity and understanding regarding curriculum middle managers' practice, and so will strive to expand the level of knowledge available in this area.

In attempting to understand the leadership role of middle managers in securing improvement within the FE sector, this study will also provide an analysis of the experiences of middle managers in a particular context and what it is to establish an institutional leadership style and practice. A context for this study is government policy for quality improvement in the FE sector, at a time when college budgets are being cut to reflect the current national economic climate. The academic literature will provide the underpinning knowledge and debate around leadership styles in bringing about change and improvements within the FE sector. It is anticipated that the study will provide data framed in an interpretive theoretical context focusing on the leadership of middle managers aiming to secure improvements. Its originality will be secured through the focus on the case study college, and the culture and operation of its leadership at this pivotal point in the FE sector's history. The results of the study will contribute to the identification of appropriate and effective leadership practice, and will help to inform senior managers and policymakers concerned with building and maintaining effective colleges.

In summary, this study will provide an original insight into middle managers' leadership practice, using new observations to support or challenge current contemporary debate around theoretical literature regarding the leadership role of middle manager ability to secure quality improvement in FE.

The overarching question this study aims to address is:

What is the relationship between curriculum middle managers' leadership practice and quality improvement?

1.8 Structure of study

1.8.1 Chapter 2: A critical review of the literature of further education curriculum middle managers' leadership practice

This chapter provides the theoretical and empirical literature research in the field of middle managers, with a particular focus on leadership practices leading to quality improvements. Firstly, the chapter critically examines literature relating to leadership to define the middle manager role within the further education sector. The literature review then evaluates the characteristics of outstanding leadership at middle management level; from this review, a theoretical framework is created to examine the practices of current curriculum middle managers. The literature review also examines the notion of quality improvement in the context of a further education college. The themes established from this review are embedded into the theoretical framework to establish an overarching framework.

1.8.2 Chapter 3: Theory and practice of curriculum middle managers in the case study college

This chapter provides in-depth background regarding the case study college and the prevailing leadership culture from senior managers in which 14 curriculum middle managers operate. In addition, this chapter highlights some of the difficulties the case study college was facing regarding the changing policy landscape and context.

1.8.3 Chapter 4: Research methodology and methods

This chapter provides details of the research methodology deployed in this case study. The chapter initially outlines the philosophical position of the researcher and provides the justification for interpretive research and a case study method for this work. In addition, clarification is made regarding the role of an *insider researcher* in order to ensure validity and reliability of findings and data collection strategies: data analysis and the limitations of the study. The strengths of a case

study are examined to justify the approach taken. Details of the responsibilities of participants who took part in the research and their roles are provided. The data collection process examined experiential knowledge, document analysis, field observations and rationale given for the semi-structured interview process used to collect data which enable participants to describe their approaches to leadership in as broad terms as possible but also to allow the development of a theory of effective leadership emerging from the participants' data (which can be compared with those suggested in the literature). Issues concerning ethics, validity, and reliability are also considered.

1.8.4 Chapter 5: Presentation of data analysis and findings

This chapter provides data derived from the interview transcripts, together with documentary material, which emerged during the research timeframe within the case-study college. The analysis draws on the experiences of curriculum middle managers as revealed in the interview data.

1.8.5 Chapter 6: Data analysis and discussion

This chapter picks up sub-themes, integrates and contextualises them within wider substantive and theoretical issues for the case study college senior managers.

1.8.6 Chapter 7: Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter draws out implications of the study for middle managers in FE, and provides a summary in relation to the research question and discussions of policy implication that this study makes to the literature and knowledge. Conclusions and recommendations also are aimed at those who select, employ and line-manage college middle managers and how they might better support and nurture the role in order to maximise their potential in the workplace. Clearly, this then is much more than human resource management, in that any tangible improvement in the performance of the role of college middle manager is likely to impact directly on student experience, with an ambition to increase retention, achievement and success.

In addition, the chapter provides an outline of limitations of this study and suggests potential future research areas.

The next chapter will discuss the theoretical and empirical literature research in the field of middle managers, with a particular focus on leadership practices leading to quality improvements. The literature review evaluates the characteristics of outstanding leadership at middle management level and also examines the notion of quality improvement in the context of a further education college.

Chapter Two: Critical review of the literature on further education curriculum middle managers' leadership practice

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a critical review of theoretical literature pertinent to the study of middle managers in further education is provided. Worldwide research into middle managers within the sector is currently limited. Briggs (2002 p2) comments that 'further education is little researched and management in further education still less. There are therefore fewer empirically based studies than in the school sector for college and researchers and managers to consider'.

Whilst there are a number of small-scale research papers providing literature around the role of the middle manager, the researcher supports Brigg's argument that, 'there still remains a vacuum of knowledge in management of further education sector'. However, there is significant research regarding leadership and strategic management in education. This diverse body of literature tends to reflect a holistic approach being applied in schools and colleges. Furthermore, the literature tends to provide practical potential solutions around leadership and management of educational organisations, arguing that a variety of leadership and management styles are being applied to achieve success.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher has examined academic literature regarding middle managers' leadership in further education. In order to understand the approach and style of leadership as well as the challenges facing the middle manager, it is necessary to understand their role within a further education college. For this reason, relevant literature relating to the middle manager's role is analysed in the first section of this literature chapter.

The middle manager's role over the last ten years has significantly changed in light of financial constraints the further education sector has to operate within and the relentless drive to improve standards of teaching and learning. Furthermore, as Thomson and Wolstencroft (2015) explain, 'curriculum middle managers have to translate strategic vision into policy and implement change to realise the organisational strategic vision'.

Government policies to address underperformance within the further education sector have radically changed with the introduction of the FE Commissioner. The analyses from the government Ofsted agency role will be examined to establish key messages to successfully raise standards within the further education sector. This will be explored extensively in this chapter to demonstrate the current policy landscape curriculum middle managers operate within.

Many academic scholars argue that leadership and management are seamlessly linked and that often both sets of skills are required to succeed as a manager. This chapter will examine the dichotomy between leadership and management for a curriculum middle manager.

The final section of this chapter comprises a review of the theoretical literature that addresses curriculum middle managers' leadership. This includes an exploration of how this literature has shaped the framework of questions used to explore key issues with curriculum middle managers (within the case study further education college).

2.2 What is leadership?

The subject of leadership is a hotly contested and complex topic; there is a vast interest in leadership by academic scholars and many educational business schools struggle to agree a general consensus to define leadership. However, the majority of academics do acknowledge that 'there are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are people who have tried to define it' (Northouse 2010 p67).

While there are many models and theories of leadership, growth in the volume of literature and significant investment by businesses in leadership programmes in the private and public sectors has resulted in many *Excellence in Leadership* programmes being devised to support organisations to increase productivity and performance of individuals.

The volume and increase in writing on the subject is illustrated by a search in the summer of 2015 of the Amazon.com website, which produced 24,612 results. This compares to a similar search by Storey in spring 2003, which yielded an 'overwhelming' 11,686 results (Storey 2004).

This section of the literature review explores the question, 'What is leadership?' It commences by attempting to define the concept in clear, succinct terms, an unattainable goal. Leadership is then compared to its close relation, management. This comparison sheds light on what leadership is, and what it is not. However, no consensus emerges. Leadership cannot be restricted, or controlled, by definition.

Given the elusive nature of leadership, a model of the phenomenon is constructed. This model is developed from the key leadership themes, which emerge from the study of a wide range of academic literature. It does not seek to address all aspects of leadership. The model is, however, practical because it captures the principal facets of leadership pertaining to the further education sector and can be readily applied to the primary research, grounded in the reality of a college of further education.

2.3 Towards a definition of leadership

The definitions of leadership provided below indicate the range of responses to the question, 'What is leadership?' The chronological progression of the definitions reflects historical developments in the understanding of leadership:

'Leadership may be considered as the process of influencing the activities of an organised group in its efforts towards goal setting and goal achievement' (Stogdill 1950:3).

'Leadership is the process by which an agent induces a subordinate to behave in a certain way' (Bennis 1959).

'Leadership is the accomplishment of a goal through the direction of human assistants. A leader is one who successfully marshals his human collaborators to achieve particular ends' (Prentice 1961 p143).

'Leadership is the presence of a particular influence relationship between two or more persons' (Hollander & Julian 1969).

'Leadership is a process of influence between a leader and those of followers' (Hollander 1978:1).

'Leadership is the influential increment over and above the mechanical compliance with the routine directives of the organisation' (Katz & Kahn 1978 p528).

'Leadership is the process of influencing the activities of an organised group toward goal achievement' (Roach & Behling 1984 p46).

'Leadership is about articulating visions, embodying values, and creating the environment within which things can be accomplished' (Richards & Engle 1986 p206).

'Leadership is the art of influencing others to their maximum performance to accomplish any task, objective or project' (Cohen 1990:9).

'Leadership is a process of giving purpose (meaningful direction) to collective effort, and causing willing effort to be expended to achieve purpose' (Jacobs & Jaques 1990 p281).

'Leadership is the process of making sense of what people are doing together so that people will understand and be committed' (Drath & Palus, 1994 p4).

'Leadership is a complex phenomenon that touches on many other important organisational, social and personal processes. It depends on a process of influence, whereby people are inspired to work towards group goals, not to coercion, but to personal motivation' (Bolden 2004 p.5).

'Leadership should be defined in terms of the ability to build and maintain a group that performs well relative to its competition' (Hogan and Kaiser 2005 p172).

'Leadership is a process of motivating people work together collaboratively to accomplish great things' (Vroom and Jago 2007 p18).

'Leadership is (a) influencing individuals to contribute group goals and (b) coordinating the pursuit of these goals' (van Vugt, Hogan and Kaiser 2008 p182-183).

'Leadership is a combination of characteristics or personality traits individual that compels that person to inspire others to achieve goals that, without the leader's motivation, would not normally be accomplished' (Bertocci and Bertocci 2009 p7).

'Leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives' (Yukl 2010 p10).

'Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal' (Northouse 2010 p3).

'Leadership is the ability to inspire confidence in and support among the people where needed to achieve organisational goals' (DuBrin 2012 p28).

'Leadership is a process of social influence, which maximises the efforts of others, towards the achievement of a goal'
(www.Forbes.com/sites/Kevinkruse/2013/04/09/what-is-leadership)

'Leadership can be defined as the capacity to influence people, by means of personal tributes and or behaviours, to achieve a common goal" updated June 2015' (www.cipd.co.uk)

From the above definitions, the key outcome is that leadership does not have a "one size fits all" definition. We all have our own ideas about what it means, however, Jameson (2005 p78) draws our attention to the fact that there is a basic agreement amongst researchers and business thinkers on some common points of understanding in the definition of leadership; 'the ability to motivate, influence, and enable individuals to contribute to the objectives of the organisations which they are members'. However, Jameson argues that this definition does not reflect what leaders have to do to achieve this:

1. Firstly, leadership creates, interprets and sustains the vision, meanings and purposes in organisations;
2. Secondly, leadership acts as a beacon for the mission, values and ethics to be upheld within this;
3. Thirdly, leadership points to future direction for growth and change in the organisation;

4. Fourthly, leadership sets the tone and directs the standards for relationship amongst followers regarding communication and culture;
5. Finally, leadership outlines strategic objectives and plans for organisations and facilitates effective management operations. (Jameson 2005 p79).

Furthermore, Jameson (2005 p81) argues that leadership is distinguishable from management:

‘Leaders determine the kind of actions to do; managers work out efficient ways to carry out these actions’.

This is further supported by Bennis and Nanus (1985 p45) who suggest:

‘Leadership is doing the right things; management is doing things right’.

Ofsted’s view when defining leadership and management supports the argument that these are transferable roles for college managers for example:

‘Leadership and management set the pace, the tone and culture of the organisation. It’s their job to set the direction of travel, get everyone on board in that and then ensure that they are all pulling in the right direction’ (Russell Jordan, HMI March 2014).

However, from direct professional experience, the absolute key thing in leadership and management from Ofsted’s perspective is what impact leadership and management have on improving teaching and learning for all learners (and therefore in improving their outcomes). In addition, when processes and procedures to support college improvements are being explored, Ofsted inspectors ask two questions of leaders and managers:

1. What is the impact of that?
2. How do you know?

The combination of answers to the above two questions will hopefully demonstrate a seamless improvement process which supports a refining landscape. However, ineffective leadership and management often leads to

weaknesses in many aspects of an institution's work. This can result in a negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning standards, which culminates in learner outcomes declining.

The role of leadership requires both on and off the job training. Grint (2005) recommends that leadership is best learned in a community of practice. Therefore, the reliance on leadership programmes alone may not be the most appropriate way of supporting middle managers to develop knowledge and skills of leadership. This supports the earlier findings, which highlight the importance of curriculum middle managers being exposed to real world-of-work challenges to put in practice their learning experiences. The need to consider a shadowing programme to support on-the-job training may be a useful tool to support middle managers to develop their understanding of the leadership role.

Many of the leadership definitions imply leaders have followers. This is a popular view of leadership in the current climate where leaders are expected to demonstrate behaviours and traits to motivate subordinates to improve the productivity of an organisation. However, Jameson (2005 p67) disagrees with this notion and suggests that 'critical aspect of leadership is the context in which it operates, and the fit between leaders and the culture in which they operate is crucial'. The notion of leaders being fit for the culture in which they operate is critical in the further education sector. From the researcher's personal experience of working in further education for over twenty-five years, there have been instances where unsuccessful curriculum middle managers have failed to understand and tackle the critical aspects of the role, for example, how raising the standards of teaching and learning will lead to improved student outcomes. This has been mainly due to the failure of senior managers not supporting middle managers in recognising the culture of the organisation they work within.

2.3.1 Summary

Leadership is a vast area and this case study is concerned mainly with aspects of people management to raise standards of teaching and learning and not

strategic or financial leadership. It is well documented that in many cases leadership and management roles are blurred in light of the same individuals undertaking both roles. All educational organisations have dedicated leaders who are responsible for setting the values and the vision of an organisation and its management in order to achieve strategic goals. Furthermore, it is accepted in the world of educational surroundings that distributed leadership is followed in many organisations. For example, teaching and lecturing staff may exercise their own powers of leadership in the classroom. In addition, curriculum middle managers or heads of department also have a leadership role in managing staff and implementing organisational policy.

The manner in which leadership is practised by individuals will depend on that prevailing culture and leadership style set by the senior leaders. Coleman and Glover (2010) argue that:

‘The extent to which leadership is successfully distributed will depend on the development of a clear and inspiring vision and values for the organisation and the communication of the vision and values’ (Coleman and Glover 2010 p3).

Summarising the list of leadership definitions, one needs to reflect on Stogdill’s 1950 definition because this retains its value, which is closely aligned to the leadership of a curriculum middle manager and many definitions listed above are broadly reflecting on Stogdill’s definition of leadership.

‘Leadership may be considered as the process of influencing the activities of an organised group in its efforts towards goal setting and goal achievement’ (Stogdill 1950 p3).

Adapting the above-mentioned definition and reflecting on the role of the curriculum middle manager, it can be argued that the key traits of successful leadership are a combination of influencing others, goal setting and achievement, motivating people, maximising performance, creating an environment to achieve outcomes and marshalling efforts of all to achieve set organisational goals.

To further distil the leadership discussion in light of defining a meaningful framework and embracing the different facets of the phenomenon, an alternative approach to defining leadership is to compare it with what it is not (or *may not be*) management.

2.4 Leadership model

This section explores leadership models in the world of education and reviews the paradoxes and tensions in the specific context of curriculum middle managers in further education colleges. From this understanding, an examination of the traits found within leadership models and the different approaches to leadership will take place.

This review will establish the critical components, which define its effectiveness (with a particular focus to secure quality improvements to improve student outcomes). Within the case study college, there are many leaders and managers of curriculum areas and cross-college support areas. There is no blueprint for an agreed approach and one size does not fit all in terms of defining what makes an effective leader. It could be argued that different approaches need to be adopted for different challenges at different moments in time and / or context and that a clear sign of an effective leader is someone who is able to know this and switch to adopt the right approach at the right time. The right approach of course cannot be judged, ahead of the problem and can only truly be measured through a review of its impact after the intervention.

Lumby (2001) points out that the fascination associated around leadership theories continues to challenge our understanding regarding how leadership impacts on fellow humans to achieve the best possible outcome in public or the private sector organisations. Academics have struggled to agree on a general consensus around leadership approaches however, there is agreement that leadership requires working with staff to achieve and organisational goals. Lumby (2003 p81) argues that 'no single person can fulfil all the requirements of

leadership ... each individual undertaking a leadership role may make an individual contribution which is unique and part of a holistic function’.

This model of dispersed leadership is prevalent within the further education sector in light of curriculum middle managers and the teachers in the classroom all participating in some aspect of leadership. For example, curriculum middle managers leading staff to maximise college performance and teachers leading learning and supporting students to achieve the best possible outcome.

Colleges are self-governing organisations with increased devolution of decision-making and operate with greater autonomy post-incorporation. However, these organisations operate in a dynamic environment. For example, the government continues to prescribe and fund qualifications in line with the skills agenda for economic growth to ensure the country is competitive in world trade, however, colleges are expected to operate effectively in an open market and attract new business and remain financially viable organisations with less and less resource to do so.

These complex dynamics offer an increasing challenge to leadership teams within the further education sector and the expectation to meet all stakeholders’ requirements. For example, Ofsted represent the government in measuring the quality of teaching and learning, whilst employers, students and parents expect programmes of study, which fit the employment agenda. Within this whole mix, the curriculum middle manager is tasked with embracing these challenges. These managers are often outstanding teachers and are selected by senior managers as ideal candidates for the position of curriculum middle managers. It is expected that these outstanding teachers will go on to be able to effectively manage teams and curricula within tight budget constraints, whilst also meeting the needs of Ofsted with good or outstanding recognition, and also ensuring that employers, parents and students are highly satisfied with the service received.

Since incorporation in 1993, college leaders have had to embrace multiple and ever expanding aspects of the leadership role. For example, financial management, marketing, quality, estates management, human resources, etc. This has resulted in leadership strategies in further education colleges being scrutinised for their effectiveness across a much broader range of outcomes than ever before. A further focus on the effectiveness of leadership is seen through the eyes of Ofsted. For example, if the quality of teaching and learning and student outcomes are poor or satisfactory, this results in the leadership and management team being seen as coasting. It is likely to trigger additional support being provided by Ofsted through 'support and challenge' interventions, aimed to rapidly improve teaching and learning and student outcomes. This of course, is all played out within the public domain, placing additional pressure on those stakeholders involved, with a potential impact upon recruitment, staff morale and job security.

This relentless drive from the government to hold educational leaders accountable for their students' outcomes brings into focus that it is all staff roles that impact on raising the quality of teaching and learning (resulting in student outcomes improving). There have been high profile national discussions across several years now supporting the notion that excellent leadership can 'turn around' a failing school or college (as supported by Ofsted), for example. Such expectations on just a select few people clearly adds to the pressure regarding their need to 'perform' and as a result it has been suggested that some potentially excellent leaders and managers are put off by the threat of being dismissed from the organisation should performance not rise significantly within just one or two academic years. The notion that 'failure is not an option' adds to the demand on those who do decide to rise to the challenge, together with the constant pressure of the government's agenda, it may feel to some like a never ending strain. There is evidence to support the notion however, that where poor performance has been turned-around and improvements made (often relatively quickly and in a measurable manner) it is often the case that highly effective leadership is present (Ofsted 2015). There is a strong case to be made, therefore, that leadership and

management is second only to teaching in terms of influencing outcomes for all students.

As stated previously, the expectations placed upon the curriculum middle manager, being the policy implementer and change maker (in terms of securing quality improvements), bring into focus the need to explore the effectiveness of their particular leadership models.

The intention of this case study is not to construct an all-embracing empirical model of leadership theory, a daunting task given the plethora of variables, and volume of literature involved. Instead, a more focused approach has been adopted by exploring the principal themes of leadership. Grint's (2005 p18) 'typology' is particularly helpful, as it brings together the key dimensions of leadership identified across the theoretical literature:

- Leadership as a person: Is it who 'leaders' are that makes them leaders?
- Leadership as a process: Is it how 'leaders' get things done that makes them leaders?
- Leadership as a position: Is it where 'leaders' operate that makes them leaders?
- Leadership as a result: Is it what 'leaders' achieve that makes them leaders?

The model is loosely based on this 'typology', which reflects the key themes of leadership, also noted by other writers. The main themes, which contribute to this model of leadership, are explored below.

2.5 Leadership as a person

A study of leadership would be inconceivable without considering the intrinsic characteristics of the leader.

Early studies of leadership concentrated on the Great Man Theory, popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in which the focus was on innate, exceptional heroic leadership (Bernard 1926). Much of today's literature on leadership still continues to focus on great leaders such as Napoleon, Churchill, Thatcher and Jack Welch. Early research attempted to define leadership in terms of personality and physical traits, the trait theory approach. Diverse traits have been highlighted including adaptability to situations, alertness to social environment, ambition, assertiveness, decisiveness, dependability, dominance, persistence, self-confidence, tolerance of stress, and willingness to assume responsibility. Stogdill (1974) reviewed 163 trait studies from 1949 to 1970. He found that, although there was no evidence of universal leadership traits, possession of some traits and skills increased the likelihood of effective leadership without guaranteeing effectiveness. Other parameters also came into play so that, for instance, a leader with certain traits was only found to be effective in some situations, and leaders with different traits could succeed in the same situation.

Traits have recently made a comeback as a primary explanation of leadership (Barker 2001). Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991), for example, identified six traits that they believed differentiate leaders from other people: drive, motivation, honesty and integrity, self-confidence, cognitive ability and knowledge of business. However, this type of research tends to assume that people will seek to adopt these traits by changing their views and personalities in order to become successful leaders (Rost 1993). Further questions remain: How can the traits that identify a successful leader be differentiated from those that define an effective administrator or ordinary citizen? How can we be sure the correct traits have been identified? Do people without these traits also become effective leaders?

A modern development of the trait theory approach is the concept of emotional intelligence, a term initially attributed to Salovey and Mayer (1990). They studied intelligent individuals who did not succeed, and discovered that for many of them this was due to their lack of interpersonal sensitivity and skills. Goleman (1998)

developed the concept further and identified twenty-five attributes of emotional intelligence including accurate self-assessment, self-confidence, trustworthiness, initiative, optimism, political awareness, and the ability to manage conflict and build bonds. He maintained that emotional intelligence was more important to leadership success than cognitive intelligence, but this has not been borne out by research.

Some writers have made clear distinctions between leadership traits and skills or competencies. Northouse (2003) views traits as 'innate and relatively fixed whereas skills can be learned and developed'. Early work by Katz (1955) differentiated between technical, human and conceptual skills. Mumford, Zaccaro, Connelly and Marks (2000) later developed a skills model, which held that leadership outcomes were the direct result of a leader's competencies in problem-solving, social judgement skills and knowledge. Their model was, however, trait driven because it was dependent on a range of 'individual attributes'.

The considerable research activities into the leader have led some authorities to question overly leader-centric approaches to research. Bennis (1999 p73), an authority on transformational leadership, has expressed scepticism of the 'Great Man tendency', which has dominated 'our thinking and perverts our understanding of organisational life'. Such reservations have not, however, stemmed the flow of research projects, which focus on the traits of exceptional leaders, and many leading authors continue to define leadership by reference to great leaders (Bennis & Nanus 1985).

There are many difficulties associated with the trait theory and related leader-centred studies. The nomenclature is often confusing and on occasion appears to have more to do with fashionable concepts than substance. There are remarkable similarities between many traits and emotional intelligence, and problems arise when attempting to differentiate between traits, skills, and competencies. It is also notoriously difficult to demonstrate a causal link between

traits and leadership effectiveness. Nevertheless, it would be unacceptable to divorce the leader from reflections on leadership.

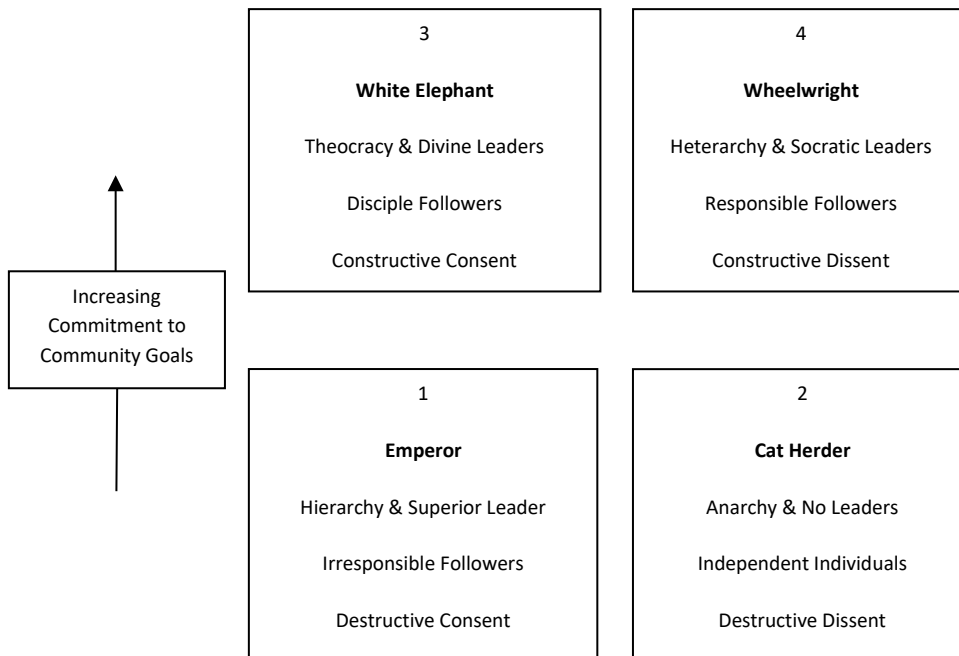
The leader as a person is an important leadership theme, but only one facet. Leaders cannot lead alone; they need dedicated followers. Whilst in this case study, the focus is clearly upon the performance of the curriculum middle manager as a leader, it must also be kept in mind that the role must also operate as an effective follower and that the ultimate performance of the curriculum middle manager cannot be divorced from their traits as a follower, or indeed the leadership and direction they themselves receive from above.

2.6 The role of followers

The considerable emphasis on the characteristics of leaders has led to criticisms by some writers that leadership theories are too 'leader-centric' (Meindl 1995) in that they focus almost exclusively on the impact of leaders on followers' attitudes and behaviours. There has been little research and theory that emphasise the characteristics of followers, as noted by Lord, Brown and Freiberg (1999 p166) who asserted that 'the follower remains an under-explored source of variance in understanding leadership processes'.

Motivated, competent followers are necessary for the success of the leader and, conversely, followers have the capacity to undermine the work of the leader. There is therefore a sense in which the leader is permitted to succeed or fail by their followers, indeed, leadership cannot exist without followers. Grint (2005) has developed a theoretical model, which illustrates the leader-follower dynamic, and the potential negative or positive contribution of the follower, see Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: A theoretical model, which illustrates the leader-follower dynamic
Source (Grint 2005)



2.7 The leader-follower dynamic

Box 1 above, imagines a hierarchy in which the leader is deemed to be superior and can therefore solve any challenges that may face the organisation. The followers that result are only marginally committed to the organisation and display irresponsible followership through the destructive consent that is associated with absence of responsibility.

In Box 2, the followers are similarly disinterested in the community but “anarchy” has resulted from their independence from the leader.

In Box 3, the leader is deemed to be a deity, and it is only by virtue of his divinity that consent can be described as constructive.

Box 4 describes an organisation in which the leader recognises his or her limitations and therefore distributes leadership as necessary. The recognition of

the limitations of any individual leader calls for constructive dissent from followers should the leader act against the interests of the community.

The introduction of the follower to the leadership paradigm enables a more balanced view of leadership, moving away from overemphasising the role of the leader by reflecting on how their followers impact on leadership.

2.8 Leadership as a process

A key feature of leadership is process: how leaders lead. It is the process of leadership that links the leader with his or her followers and achieves outcomes. The way in which leaders get things done will emanate from leader behaviours, that is, what leaders actually do on the job, the way they act. Behaviour is in turn, inextricably bound up with leadership traits, skills and competencies. In many instances for example, a school or college, which demonstrates excellent leadership, can improve outcomes for learners by recruiting and keeping high quality staff who benefit from high quality administrative support. Staff benefit from excellent leadership that works collaboratively towards clear and common goals.

Process is an important aspect of leadership. Hughes, Ginnett and Curphy (2002 p92) focus their leading text on the contention that 'leadership is a process, not a position'. The authors then use three case studies to illustrate the gap between leadership research and personalised accounts of leadership: Colin Powell, Madeleine Albright and Konosuke Matsuchita, all obviously leaders in a positional sense whatever the processes they adopted. This illustrates the tendency of writers to overemphasise certain aspects of leadership. In contrast, this review seeks to develop a balanced leadership model that recognises the importance of a significant range of variables.

The growing complexities of organisational life, competition and scarcity of resources require the increasingly effective use of human capital. This has

encouraged researchers to consider how leaders can revitalise or transform organisations. Burns (1978), in his best-selling book on political leadership, has distinguished between two fundamental and contrasting leadership processes or behaviours: transactional leadership and transformational leadership.

Transactional leadership motivates followers by appealing to their self-interest and exchanging benefits. It is about providing pay and other benefits in return for work effort. Bass (1985) in his original theory included two types of transactional behaviour: *Contingent Reward*, and *Passive Management by Exception*. Contingent reward behaviour involves clarification of the work required to obtain rewards, and the use of incentives and contingent rewards to influence motivation. Passive management by exception is concerned with the use of contingent punishments and other corrective action in response to obvious deviations from acceptable performance standards. An additional behaviour, *Active Management by Exception*, was added more recently to the initial theory.

‘In this behaviour mistakes are sought out and rules enforced to avoid mistakes’ (Bass & Avolio 1990).

Bass (1985) identified a number of reasons why transactional leadership may fail. Firstly, leaders may lack the reputation for being able to deliver the contingent rewards. Secondly, transactional behaviours may be abandoned in cases where non-contingent rewards are found to improve performance just as well. Thirdly, contingent reprimand or punishment may not have any beneficial effect on performance. Lastly, followers may cut corners to complete the exchange of reward for compliance.

‘Transformational leadership is now widely regarded as a more effective leadership behaviour than transactional leadership’ (Burns 1978).

It appeals to the moral values of followers in order to raise their consciousness about ethical issues and mobilise their energy and resources to reform institutions. Bass (1985) argues that the transformational leader motivates the follower to do more than they may have been expected to do. He asserts that transformational leaders motivate and transform followers by making them more

aware of the importance and value of achieving task outcomes, encouraging them to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the team or organisation, and activating higher level needs for example, by adding the need for self-actualisation to the need for recognition. Yukl (2010 p274) has drawn up some guidelines, based on research, for practising transformational leadership:

- Articulate a clear and compelling vision.
- Explain how the vision can be obtained.
- Act confident and optimistic.
- Express confidence in followers.
- Use dramatic, symbolic actions to emphasise key values.
- Lead by example.

Other writers have focused on somewhat different aspects of transformational leadership. Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999), for example, identified direction setting, people development, culture building and relationship building as core elements.

Transformational leadership is often closely associated in the literature with charismatic behaviours. The terms are often used more or less interchangeably. Bass (1985) claimed that 'charisma is the most important component in the concept of transformational leadership'. He highlighted key elements of charismatic leadership as the ability to inspire followers and command respect, a special gift of discerning important issues, and a sense of mission that excited responses. Storey (2004 p28), following his study of the considerable literature on the charismatic leader, found six key elements:

1. A heroic figure (usually attributed with past success stories).
2. A mystic in touch with higher truths.
3. A value-driven individual rather than one who is apparently purely self-serving.
4. Someone who is perceived to 'know the way'.

5. An individual who has a vision of a more desirable and achievable future.
6. Someone thought to be capable of caring for and developing followers.

The major theories of charismatic leadership have emphasised its positive consequences. There is however, a growing body of literature, which highlights the risks associated with charisma. Khurna (2002) for example, published a paper entitled “The Curse of the Superstar CEO.” This drew attention to a number of disadvantages that may arise from relying on charismatic leadership. Companies may overemphasise the impact the CEO has on company performance, candidates who are suitable for leadership positions may be overlooked by recruiters, who insist on charisma and the destabilising effects that charismatic leadership can have on organisations, may be discounted.

The progression of thinking from transactional to transformational and charismatic leadership in recent years is an important development. Transformational leadership is not a panacea, but has contributed much to the understanding of the process of leadership. Yukl (2010 p277) observes that it provides ‘an explanation for the exceptional influence some leaders have on subordinates’. The temptation to erase earlier insights into leadership process can be overcome by adopting elements from several theories. Avolio and Bass (2002) have described effective leaders as ‘those who exercise both transactional and transformational leadership’. This leads to a more balanced approach, avoiding the excesses, which may arise from overemphasising the importance of charisma.

2.9 Leadership as a position

The focus on great leaders in positions of power has persisted from early studies of “great men” to recent examinations of heroic charismatic figures. Resultant leader-centric theories have contributed to a highly individualistic view of leadership, described by Senge (2000 p64) as ‘a cult of individualism’. Much leadership literature concentrates on great leaders, exceptional people who lead

in exceptional ways, often displaying charismatic behaviours. Most of these outstanding individuals are also leaders by virtue of their position with respect to their followers. Their leadership is at least in part, defined by their position in a hierarchy. They are often found at the top of organisational structures, in positions of authority and power within corporate, military or political structures.

In recent years an alternative to overly leader-centric studies has appeared. Researchers have looked beyond the role of a single leader to develop an understanding of distributed or dispersed leadership. In the distributed model leadership resides, 'not solely in the individual at the top, but in every person at entry level who in one way or another, acts as a leader' (Goleman 2002 p14).

Distributed leadership is contrasted with more traditional approaches by Raelin (2003). He suggests that more people are involved in leadership than merely those in formal positions; that leadership is collaborative and compassionate rather than controlling and dispassionate; and generates community rather than simply an organisation. Spillane, Alverson and Diamond (2001 p23), from their work in schools, offer the notion that 'leadership is best understood as distributed practice, stretched over the school's social and situational contexts'.

Lambert (2002 p1) goes one-step further, proposing that 'leadership is the professional work of everyone'. A complete divorce from individualistic approaches to leadership is the idea of systemic leadership (Lumby 2003). Systemic leadership, rather than being consciously distributed, 'flows through an organisation, spanning levels and flowing both up and down hierarchies' (Ogawa & Bossert 1997 p10). This results in a fluid, ever-shifting view of leadership, which is open to all members of an organisation.

'Distributed leadership allows for a broadening of the scope of leadership tasks from those that may be associated with a heroic, charismatic leader. More modest or mundane activities such as administration, listening, creating a pleasant working atmosphere or solving practical or technical problems could therefore be regarded as leadership tasks' (Alvesson & Sveningsson 2003).

Grint (2005) observes that distributed leadership implies a shift towards more flexible organisational structures. Leadership roles therefore, need not be confined within normal organisational boundaries, but can be adopted as and when necessary.

The concept of distributed leadership serves as a counterbalance to the much-lauded notion of the heroic leader. It is likely to be particularly attractive to subordinates who favour a greater involvement in leadership, and recognition of their contributions to leadership. It may be particularly relevant and attractive in organisations, such as schools and colleges, in which individuals have a personal professional identity and status as well as a given role as employees within the organisation. Gemmill and Oakley (1997) rightly favour a shift from dependency on leadership to release creativity and opportunities for change. However, to dispense completely with a more individualistic approach to leadership could have the perverse effect of stifling effective decision making and creating ineffective organisations. Once again, a degree of balance is required. The extremes of focusing on a single heroic leader, or distributing leadership to the extent that it disappears completely should, both be avoided.

2.10 The wider context

The position of leadership is only one facet of the wider context, or situation, of leadership, which is often not properly accounted for in leadership studies. Hughes *et al.* (2002) describe the situation as 'probably the most complex factor in the leader-follower framework'. They argue that the role of context is such that it can minimise the impact of other factors such as traits, behaviours, attitudes and relationships.

Bolman and Deal (1991 p498), from their study of leadership and context in the US, concluded that 'traditional notions of the solitary, heroic leader have led us to focus too much on the actors and too little on the stage on which they play their

part'. They claimed that the adage 'leaders make things happen' should be modified to 'things make leaders happen'.

Storey (2004) highlights the role of context in current leadership research, pointing out the importance of international cultural differences, industrial sector differences and other contextual variables. Avolio and Bass (1988) have noted how industry sector plays a part in the effectiveness of transformational and charismatic leadership.

Other theorists, for example Perrow (1970) emphasise that leadership behaviour is extensively shaped by organisational characteristics. Pawar and Eastman (1997) attempted to link contextual features with transformational leadership. They demonstrated that organisational receptivity to transformational leadership was impacted by organisational emphases on efficiency or adaptation, the relative dominance of the technical elements of the business, the organisational structure, and the mode of governance.

A particularly interesting model of the context of leadership has been developed by Nadler and Tushman (1997), the Congruence Model. The model analyses a range of related factors and considers how they impact on leaders and followers. The factors are wide-ranging and include task structure, job characteristics, organisational structure, design and culture, and environmental factors such as legal, political and economic forces. These factors can have a profound effect on any positive changes that the leader may be seeking (for example. productivity or follower satisfaction), even negating the sought outcomes. Such theories have been developed, known as situational and contingency theories, which try to match styles of leadership to appropriate situations.

An example is the path-goal theory of leadership (for example, Evans 1974 and House & Dessler 1974). This examines how aspects of leader behaviour influence subordinate satisfaction and motivation. Leaders motivate subordinates by influencing their perceptions of the consequences likely to arise

from different levels of effort. If subordinates believe that valued outcomes can only be obtained by making a serious effort and that such an effort will be successful, then they are likely to make the required effort. The appropriate leadership behaviour for improving subordinate satisfaction and effort is dependent on aspects of the situation such as the nature of the task, the work environment, and subordinate characteristics.

The context of leadership, including position and other contextual factors, introduces an element of considerable complexity to the leadership model. Context has a significant impact on the effectiveness of leadership, and different situations call for different approaches to leadership. The nature and impact of context are both difficult to grasp and measure. This complicates the most important and meaningful link of all: the link between leadership and its results.

2.11 Leadership as a result

Any study of leadership without consideration of the results or effectiveness of leadership would be futile for practical purposes. Grint (2005 p68) notes that there would be little support for leadership but for results. He points out that individuals may reach positional leadership, but 'if the results of their position are negligible then they will not be regarded as successful leaders'.

There are a number of key challenges presented by the notion of leadership effectiveness:

- The definition of effectiveness: what is being measured?
- The problem of establishing causality: can any results be traced back to the leader?
- The possible negative connotations of leadership-generated results.
- Ethical considerations of the processes adopted to achieve the results.

Leadership effectiveness is most commonly measured by whether the leader's organisational unit is successful in carrying out its tasks and attaining its goals (Yukl 2010). In an educational context leadership, effectiveness can be established by objective measures of student achievements as well as more subjective measures such as the quality of teaching in the classroom, the motivation of teachers, and the development of a learning culture (Day, Harris, & Hadfield 2001). Other measures of effectiveness could be a leader's effectiveness ratings established through their performance appraisals, or a subordinate's ratings of their job satisfaction, morale and motivation. In addition, it can be appropriate to explore subordinates' ratings of their leaders (Hughes *et al.* 2002).

Tracing the outcomes of leadership to individual leaders is problematic and controversial. Several studies have been undertaken from a psychological approach for example, Gerstner & Day (1977) which suggest that it is possible to measure the effects of leaders, but the validity of these measures is often questioned by more sociologically inclined authors (for example, Alvesson & Sveningsson 2003). A further complicating factor is the likelihood of time delays in achieving outcomes from leadership interventions. The problems of establishing causality are such that Grint (2005 p65) suggests that 'any simple notion of assessing leadership by its alleged results is doomed to fail: the results of leadership are as contested as the definitions, and we would be better served by considering leadership as a subjunctive verb – as something that may, or may not, have results, rather than something that definitely does or does not'.

Grint (2005) makes the important point that, even if results can be traced to the actions of a leader, this is not necessarily good news for the organisation. Outcomes may have perverse or distorting effects, as followers are encouraged to achieve specific measurable results. A good example from the researchers own experience of working within the sector, is the temptation for colleges to encourage students who are perceived at risk of failing to withdraw before critical census dates, in order to maximise government measures of student success.

Lastly, focusing on the outcomes of leadership raises questions about the ethics of the process by which results are achieved. Northouse (2003) reflects on coercive leaders like Hitler and then argues that a distinction should be made between coercion and leadership. Doh (2003) reflects this view, suggesting that unethical methods should negate any claims to leadership, but does not define what is or is not ethical. To deny the title of leader to individuals in positions of authority who exercise elements of coercive and/or unethical behaviours would disqualify many 'leaders', making it even more difficult to establish causality between leadership and its effectiveness.

There is no straightforward causal link between leadership and its results, but little value in leadership without positive outcomes. The difficulties of making objective judgements about a leader's performance are well documented. Nevertheless, attempts at establishing this relationship are crucial, even if results cannot be attributed to the leader with any degree of certainty.

However, for curriculum middle managers there are several aspects of the role, which are easily identifiable and relevant across the whole organisation. These being:

- Leadership as a person.
- Leadership as a process.
- Leadership as a position.
- Leadership as a result.

Against the background explained above of Grint's (2005) model of leadership, which we can term a four key element model of leadership, we can now further explore how this model can be helpful to our understanding of a middle manager's role in leading their departments in the contemporary FE college.

2.12 Acquirement of knowledge

Leadership as a person - it is important that a curriculum middle manager recognises that they will be required within their role, to set clear targets and reflect critically on their own practice to establish strengths and weaknesses. This will then require the individual to embrace and adopt new leadership styles, for example, a self-assessment on leadership practices identifying areas of learning. It is this self-critical and reflective process which can help the leader to learn and therefore to lead more effectively.

Leadership as a process - recognising the need to listen, persuade and demonstrate humility when supporting others is critical. Furthermore, tackling difficult matters with past friends and fellow teachers requires considerable experience and skill to ensure matters are dealt with professionally. This requires staff mentoring and professional human resources training.

Leadership as a position - leaders have followers. The awareness of the leadership role and its relevant magnitude needs to be fully understood by the curriculum middle manager. The requirements of the role must also be fully understood. For example, followers will have clear expectations for the leader to set expectations and lead from the front. The individual can no longer operate within the previous framework; senior management expectations will be for the individual to step up to the next level. For example, current job descriptions for curriculum middle managers clearly indicate that they are no longer seen as a teacher in the classroom but as a manager. This transfer of role requires mentoring and a theoretical learning programme.

Leadership as a result - leaders have to recognise that all organisations are outcome driven. In the context of this case study, further education institutions are measured by the success of student outcomes and the financial viability of the organisation. When leaders are appointed to post by senior managers it is important for the curriculum middle manager to clarify his or her targets. Individuals may require training to grasp a clear understanding of target setting

for teachers in the classroom. Therefore, motivating, inspiring and setting clear expectations will be important.

2.13 Summary

From this literature review, leadership models vary according to the dynamics of the organisation being considered in the given context. Grint (2005 p45) states 'The longer we spend looking at leadership the more complex it becomes'. For the further education sector, effective leadership is critical to secure quality improvements to improve student outcomes. Lumby (2003) reminds us all that no one single leader can fulfil the requirements of leadership and that each individual within the organisation plays a significant role which is unique and part of a holistic function. Furthermore, Grint (2005) supports the notion that distributed leadership reinforces the nature of responsibility and flexibility which enables a collective approach to achieve strategic goals, involving a whole organisation approach (and not relying on a single charismatic leader or a bureaucratic structure).

The leader's role within this model is to ensure he / she provides the capacity to focus on direct resources commanded by conventional structures. The traits of the leader are critical to ensure success can be achieved. Curriculum middle managers have a position which is clearly defined within the organisational structure and have followers. It is important for the curriculum middle manager not to become a formulaic individual who fails to take risk and empower others who report to him or her.

All leadership roles are measured for outcome, for example whilst the college Chief Executive and Principal is responsible for the overall student outcome position, this responsibility is devolved further down to curriculum middle managers. It is at this point within the organisation where middle managers' leadership effectiveness and impact are measured. This measure is the result of student outcomes. Curriculum middle managers' approach and actions to

achieve the best possible student outcomes are scrutinised for impact. The processes of leadership deployed by the middle manager often defines those who can demonstrate through practice, their leadership qualities.

In the current climate of financial constraints and the relentless drive to achieve high student success rates, curriculum middle managers need to assess and analyse the appropriate process to deploy. In many cases, curriculum middle managers tend to have a mixed approach, which can lead to minimal impact on student outcomes. The person who was given the responsibility of the leadership role (in this instance the curriculum middle manager) is required to interact with fellow colleagues and college systems to improve student performance.

2.14 Leadership for learning

Learning is at the heart of all educational institutions, it is the reason for their existence and the prime function of all leaders is to enhance the learning outcomes of the students within their institutions. It is well documented that the relationship between leadership and learning is one of the most important issues in enhancing the effectiveness of educational institutions. The ambition to improve the impact of the educational institution to secure improved student outcomes has been a key driver of change in central government directives in schools and colleges for many years.

In 2011, the coalition government reinforced the importance of teaching and learning in FE. John Hayes, Minister of State with specific responsibility for FE colleges stated that:

‘As politicians we can play our parts but much more important are the teachers and the learners that really make the difference’ (Wolf Report 2011 p6).

His colleague, David Willetts supported this by reaffirming that, ‘A key aim of the coalition is to recognise good teaching at all levels’.

In November 2010, the government produced a white paper called 'The Importance of Teaching.' (Wolf Report 2011 p7)

This shift in government policy reaffirmed the centrality of teaching to the process of education:

'At the heart of our plan is a vision of the teacher as our society's most valuable asset. We know that nothing matters more in improving education than giving every child access to the best possible teaching. There is no calling more noble, no profession more vital and no service more important than teaching. It is because we believe the importance of teaching – as the means by which we deliberate every child to become the adult they aspire to be – that this white paper has been written. The importance of teaching cannot be overstated' (Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, November 2010).

In the introduction section of the white paper, the Prime Minister and his deputy stated that:

'The first, and most important, lesson is that no education system can be better than the quality of its teachers' (Prime Minister David Cameron and Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg - The Importance of Teaching November 2010 p1).

Critics would argue that the above statement is nothing new because teaching and learning is at the heart of all educational institutions. The reaffirmation that teaching really matters after two decades of public policy focusing on structural reform, new buildings, targets and financial autonomy is refreshing for the sector. The government then challenged Ofsted to realign the Ofsted Inspection Handbook 2012 for the education sector to ensure the quality of teaching and learning became the critical component in all aspects of educational inspections in England. No educational institution could achieve an overall outstanding grade from Ofsted unless all aspects of quality of this teaching and learning are graded outstanding (teaching and learning being the 'deal breaker').

Therefore, in many cases the improvements have focused on the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom being a major component in improving student outcomes. The government's relentless drive to improve colleges'

performance within the education sector in England resulted in the introduction of the Further Education (FE) Commissioner to drive improvement and acting quickly to tackle failing colleges. Furthermore, the FE Commissioner will advise government ministers and the funding agencies on the actions that need to be taken to swiftly tackle poor performance in FE colleges. The criteria which support the intervention from the FE Commissioner are as follows:

- A college graded as inadequate;
- Fails to meet national minimum standards of performance set by the government department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), or
- Receives an inadequate assessment for financial health or management by the Skills Funding Agency.

The government's key argument for the introduction of the FE Commissioner is:

'The government intends to ensure that anyone choosing to study at a college can benefit from world-class education and training. The new FE Commissioner role will ensure that whenever a college or institution's fall short of delivering high quality provision, improvement can be made swiftly so that learners get the education and training that they deserve' (Skills and Enterprise Minister Matthew Hancock MP - November 2013).

For this reason, examining processes, which relate to leaders' thinking and practical actions, are of key interest to practitioners and policymakers within the education sector to establish best practice, which supports educational institutions raising student outcomes.

Leadership for learning means many things to many people. Rhodes and Brundrett (2010 p32) argue that there is 'no firm definition of the term leadership and learning either nationally or internationally, and usage is likely to be influenced by the intermediate context of the educational organisation within which the discourse is located and the prevailing policy and culture conditions of the country involved'. Furthermore, Fitzgerald and Gunter, (2006) suggest that 'leadership in learning can occur at all levels and is fostered by opportunities to build professional learning communities'. However, Rhodes and Brundrett *et al.*

(2010 p19) argue 'more distributed forms of leadership, in which teachers are encouraged to take a greater role in the leadership of change and innovation the key to better outcomes'.

The complexity involved in agreeing a framework requires both arguments to be embraced because they are seamlessly linked. Macbeth and Dempster (2009) suggest five principles that underpin leadership for learning which embraces both in that leadership in learning occurs at all levels and a distributed form of leadership in which teachers are given opportunities to influence change.

These being:

1. Shared or distributing leadership.
2. A focus on learning.
3. Creation of the conditions favourable for learning.
4. Variation of a dialogue about leadership and learning.
5. The establishment of a shared sense of accountability.

From the researcher's experience of the case study college as well as previous organisations, it is increasingly accepted that senior leaders in colleges largely support a distributed leadership model in which curriculum middle managers are providing leadership for learning. For example, curriculum middle managers participate in lesson observation processes, staff appraisals, appoint new staff, lead on curriculum change, have dialogue with the student population, influence cross-college support departments functions, are held accountable for student outcomes and are a key player in creating conditions favourable for learning by influencing senior managers to support change and innovation in the classroom. The relationship between curriculum middle managers' leadership and the achievement of educational institutions is therefore critical.

There have been two opposing sets of views supporting leadership for learning. One a top-down model, which is teacher, centred or a bottom-up pupil centred approach (Silcock and Brundrett 2002). However, more recently the above

mentioned approaches are both encouraged to create a twin perspective that are both top-down and bottom-up (Silcock and Brundrett 2002).

This model supports a co-constructivist approach, which relies on 'all members of staff cooperate, negotiate, resolve differences, mediate between options, and generally act in a socially skilled manner to reach decisions that will in enhance student learning and that educators will also work in partnership with students in order to enable them to appreciate alternatives and experiment with radical positions' (Rhodes and Brundrett 2010).

The current thinking of many academic scholars (Bush 2011; Hargreaves and Fink 2006; Southworth 2004) in exploring leadership for learning supports the notion of collaboration and distribution of power and authority as being central to learning (which leads to educational institutions improving student outcomes).

This view is further supported by Ofsted who clearly see a link between the quality of teaching and effective leadership. For example, the annual report for 2008/09 states that:

'There is a close link between the judgements for leadership and management, overall effectiveness and the capacity to improve' (2008/09 p39).

The report for 2009/10 gives more detail, particularly in relation to sixteen colleges that had improved since their previous inspection:

'In these colleges, leadership and management galvanise staff and students around a shared vision and commitment to raise outcomes and aspirations. There is a clear focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning, reinforced in some cases by lesson observation and targeted professional development. Robust performance management and accurate self-assessment systems are informed by the good use of data. The involvement of leaders at all levels and close attention to the views of learners both contribute strongly to improvement' (2009/10 p26).

This model is evident in further education colleges that were awarded grade one outstanding by Ofsted during the period September 2012 – July 2015. Analysing these reports the key themes are as follows:

1. College self-assessment reports identify strengths and areas of improvement accurately and clearly. The process of self-assessment is well established, involves staff appropriately and leads to improvement being made quickly. Managers, using their autonomy and the resources at their disposal ensure actions in the quality improvement plan carried out decisively.
2. Managers collect the views of learners and employers frequently and use them well to improve programmes and other aspects of college life. The college acts promptly on learners' comments about securing further improvements.
3. Teachers and assessors improve their teaching and professional skills as a result of a rigorous and comprehensive lesson observation process that integrates effectively with the highly successful system of performance management and continuous professional development. Learner success continues to improve as a result.
4. Through the college's rigorous quality improvement process, managers carefully monitored the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Measures to assess and improve outcomes for learners have ensured high standards, with learners receiving outstanding support.
5. Staff throughout the college contribute to a culture in which learners take a personal priority. They have an unrelenting determination that each learner should achieve his or her best.

6. Quality assurance arrangements are very thorough and detailed, and involve all staff as well as a range of learners and employers.
7. The college listens to, and makes very good use of students to improve further the quality of teaching and learning and to enrich their overall experience of college life. College managers take great care in evaluating the impact of actions taken.
8. Colleges' lesson observation process is rigorous and clearly identifies priorities for improving teaching and learning. Teachers receive constructive feedback. By improving support, mentoring and frequent development opportunities enable them to become more effective teachers. They make very good use of opportunity to share good practice in improving their craft.

From the above it seems the link between leadership and learning are critical if student outcomes are to be improved. Rhodes and Brundrett (2010) recommend that 'head teachers in schools and principles in colleges are encouraged increasingly to understand the importance of their role in enhancing the learning experience of students and to seek to ensure that structures and systems to support teaching and learning are created as part of the leadership responsibility and accountability' (Rhodes and Brundrett 2010 p156).

Furthermore, they argue that schools and colleges need to create a learning environment which supports teachers to develop their teaching skills because 'teachers are leaders of teaching and learning in classrooms, senior leaders need to help teachers to improve their own practice by enabling teachers to continue to learn themselves...'The notion of becoming a learning centred institution where both staff and students are at the centre of their work' (Rhodes and Brundrett 2010 p156).

In addition, Robinson (2007) supports the notion that supporting teaching staff to develop and further enhance their teaching skills is critical because this demonstrates and acknowledges that leaders recognise teaching requires continuous professional development and sharing of best practice. This role within the further education sector is empowering middle leaders and teachers to take direct lead in teaching and learning. Therefore, when senior leaders are appointing teachers it is imperative that the curriculum middle manager is part of that process to ensure that the right teacher gets into the right job at the right time. Curriculum middle managers need to maintain a strong focus on teaching and learning and appreciate that what constitutes effective teaching and learning may vary from context to context. In light of this, the curriculum middle manager needs to reflect on individual teachers' strengths and accommodate the teacher's strong point to experiment and empower a culture of accountability for student outcomes to support a culture of organisational learning. To achieve this, the researcher supports the argument made by Rhodes and Brundrett that 'middle leaders are important in strategy to develop learning centred leadership in schools and colleges. The balance of trust, autonomy, empowerment and personal accountability resides within individual teams, and middle leaders need to be able to implement effective teaching and learning strategies' (Rhodes and Brundrett 2010 p162).

The case study college reflects a common picture within the further education sector in that too often the appointment of curriculum middle managers assumes that these managers are outstanding or good teachers in the classroom and have the necessary skill set to communicate and build working relationships with colleagues in their teams. These are critical fundamental aspects of the curriculum middle managers' role in providing leadership to raise standards of quality in teaching and learning which resulted in student outcomes improving. In this case, study, the 3 Ofsted inspection reports for the college showed that curriculum middle managers were not consistently addressing the quality of teaching and learning systematically to address underperformance. It would be disingenuous to solely hold accountable the curriculum middle managers for this

failure because the senior leadership team at the college have a critical role in creating the environment and culture to create capacity and provide support in developing middle managers and also motivating teaching staff by creating supportive working conditions (Leithwood *et al.* 2006).

Dedicated research on leading learning in further education is very limited, however, a recent paper published by CfBT Education Trust, '*Leading Learning in Further Education*' (May 2011) reflects upon the practical experiences of twenty-seven 157 group member colleges describing how effective leadership can improve outcomes for learners. The findings of this report further echo and support the argument:

'The leaders in the institution should actively lead the learning opportunities, monitoring the implementation of the training by their teachers, and monitoring any improvement in student outcomes. They should develop a learning culture among teachers' (Timperley H *et al.* 2007 p145).

The key recommendations of this paper were that current and aspiring leaders should:

1. Review their own practice of what constitutes good teaching and learning within their own institution.
2. Note the importance of creating a supportive and enabling culture in the organisation as well as actions more directly focused on teaching and learning.
3. Work collaboratively to help them develop a shared sector view of good practice to improve quality of teaching and learning.

Geoff Petty argues that too often college quality processes and procedures constantly measure staff outputs and there is little evidence of high quality (effective) bespoke professional development to raise standards of teaching and learning to meet the needs of individual teachers. Furthermore, he supports the premise that leaders can help the improvement of teaching and learning by:

1. Acknowledging and promoting the need for collaborative work for example, peer coaching in meetings.
2. Ensuring that meetings are frequent and longer enough and sufficiently well attended.
3. Expecting a high standard of peer coaching.
4. Expecting that trials of new methods are sufficiently informed by evidence and sufficiently self-critical to learn from.
5. Monitoring the middle managers' role described above. Are they being effective in maximising the degree of implementation of strategies?
6. Being positive, and inspiring by promoting the view that 'improving teaching is both vital for learners and possible' (Petty G 2006 p25).

However, Martinez and Maynard argue that creating a culture of teacher autonomy is critical and that middle managers in some instances have little impact:

'More importantly, effective teachers and effective teams proved to be relatively autonomous in one highly successful college, a senior management team have fostered this autonomy through a strong commitment to improving teaching and learning. In another however, a successful team had operated for a year without a section leader or head of department' (Maynard and Martinez, 2002).

The researcher fundamentally questions this finding because in the long term, the middle manager provides a consistent view and implements senior managers' strategic decisions. However, this approach may be productive over a short/limited period. The researcher, as an experienced senior manager, argues it is unrealistic to provide support for teachers on a daily basis (and remove the middle managers' role) because the key focus of the senior manager's role is to provide strategic academic leadership. For example, this may include interpreting and demystifying government policy, implementing change, providing support to second-tier managers and general position in the college as a 'community leader'.

A further report published by Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) for the further education sector asked a fundamental question:

'What do institution leaders do that is effective in facilitating quality improvements in teaching and learning?'

The findings support the previous literature review established in this case study however; they also establish an interesting framework to further explore the issue of leading learning in further education. The framework reflects on four broad headings:

1. Developing people – is argued that the most effective single leader can do is to involve themselves in the professional learning and development of their staff. This can achieve participating with staff in learning activities, talking about teaching and effective practice, keeping abreast of current research, CDs of pedagogy etc. and encouraging staff to do the same. It can also include encouragement for teachers to reflect on their own practice and involve staff, as professionals, in institutional decision-making.
2. Managing the teaching programme – effective leaders or those who get directly involved in teaching and learning, either leading change themselves or ensuring that changes are led by most effective colleagues. They are also actively engaged in monitoring the effectiveness of teaching programmes, providing formative and summative feedback to teachers and ensuring that they get the support, they need to provide high quality learning experience. This is possible it is argued, only if leaders are knowledgeable about pedagogic theory and processes and use it to identify and address problems.
3. Setting directions – an important ingredient of effective leadership is the ability to set and articulate a vision for the organisation and translate that

into concrete goals. Clarity about the central importance of teaching and learning, allied to actions that reinforce that centrality is therefore a key driver of teaching and learning quality. The ability to communicate expectations to staff and students to maintain a focus on key organisational goals even in a turbulent environment is associated with consistent improvements in performance.

4. Building relationships – effective leaders are good at building organisations where staff enjoy effective working relationships, both with each other and with leaders and learners. Characteristics of organisations that promote effective teaching and learning include workplaces where the leadership is seen as accessible to all staff; where there is a high degree of mutual trust and there is support for collaborative working. Distributed leadership model, where most staff take on some form of leadership role, is often cited as a particularly effective approach to establishing an environment that favours excellent teaching and learning.

2.14.1 Summary

In this section, the researcher argues that government policy will eventually influence a leadership style for learning. This may benefit academic institutions who have failed to improve student outcomes. The current government's relentless approach to ensure that failing further education colleges demonstrate rapid improvement and enable all students to experience good or better quality of teaching and learning, is a key message for all leaders within the further education sector. This unwavering approach is further strengthened by the introduction of the FE Commissioner, thus empowering government to swiftly intervene where individual colleges are not rapidly improving student academic outcomes or are financially unstable.

Robinson (2007) argues that the leader's role to create a learning centred institution which supports both student and staff learning, is critical to empower

staff to deploy innovative teaching and learning strategies in order to motivate students to achieve.

Senior leaders distributing leadership to curriculum middle managers to improve the quality of teaching and learning must be given appropriate support and capacity created for these managers to participate in strategic decision-making within a culture of trust and accountability.

Ofsted intrinsically links good or better leadership and management in further education colleges as the key fundamental ingredient in colleges where student outcomes are good or outstanding.

There is a significant degree of agreement between academic scholars with regard to how leadership can best bring about improvements in teaching and learning. The effective leadership of learning appears to involve four areas of practice:

1. Leaders investing time and resources to promote the professional development of staff.
2. Leaders having a close involvement in the management of teaching programmes.
3. Leaders setting clear directions for the organisation, including the centrality of teaching and learning.
4. Leaders establishing a culture, which respects the professionalism of teachers and empowers them to innovate.

Finally, the researcher as insider argues that too often school and college leaders are pre-occupied by government policy changes and lose focus on teaching and learning as a means to secure improved learner outcomes. Therefore, leaders should pay close attention to the quality of teaching and learning in the educational institutions. The key role of the education institution must focus on providing good or outstanding teaching and learning leading to high student

outcomes and resulting in all staff playing a leadership role in raising standards of teaching and learning.

2.15 Leadership versus management

To attempt to define leadership by contrasting it with management is a popular, if rather traditional way of understanding the phenomenon. Kotter (1990), for example, differentiated the two in terms of core processes and intended outcomes. He held that leadership sought to produce organisational change by:

- Developing a vision of the future and strategies for accomplishing organisational change;
- Communicating and explaining the vision;
- Motivating and inspiring people to attain the vision.

Conversely, he argued that management was about achieving predictability and order by:

- Setting organisational goals, establishing action plans with timetables and allocating resources;
- Organising and staffing (establishing structure, assigning people to jobs);
and
- Monitoring results and solving problems.

According to Kotter (1990), there is some overlap between leadership and management. Both involve deciding what needs to be done, creating networks of relationships to undertake tasks, and seeking to ensure outcomes. He believed that strong leadership could disrupt order and efficiency, and strong management could discourage risk taking and innovation.

Rost (1991) adopted a different approach, defining leadership as a multidirectional and non-coercive influence relationship between leaders and followers with the mutual purpose of achieving real change. This contrasted with

management, an authority relationship that exists between a manager and subordinates to produce and sell goods and services. He argued that managers could also be leaders, but only if they exercised this influence relationship, a necessary attribute for influencing people over whom the leader has no formal authority, or in organisations where change is required.

A useful summary of the leadership-management dichotomy has been drawn up by Storey (2004), which captures many of the key distinctions made by academics and leadership consultants, see Table 1 (below):

Table 1: Leadership – management dichotomy

Northouse (2010 p10) recommends that an alternative method to distinguish between leadership and management is to examine the skill set and competencies required for both roles.

Leaders	Managers
Are transformative	Are transactional
Seek to challenge and change systems	Seek to operate and maintain current systems
Create new visions and new meanings	Accept given objectives and meanings
Empower	Control and monitor
Seek to inspire and transcend	Trade on exchange relationships
Have a long-term focus	Have a short-term focus
Focus on the strategic big picture	Focus on detail and procedure

Source: Storey (2004 p135)

Table 2: Leadership – management dichotomy

Leadership Produces Change and Movement	Management Produces Order and Consistency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing direction • Creating a vision • Clarifying the big picture • Setting strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning and budgeting • Establishing agendas • Setting timetables • Allocating resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aligning people • Communicating goals • Seeking commitment to • Building teams and coalitions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organising and staffing • Provide a structure • Making job placements • Establishing rules and procedures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivating and inspiring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Controlling and problem-solving

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspiring and energise • Empowering subordinates • Satisfying on unmet needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing incentives • Generating creative solutions • Taking corrective action
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Source: Northouse (2010 p10)

Some writers argue that leadership and management are both qualitatively different and mutually exclusive, ultimately to the extent that the same person cannot exercise both processes. Zaleznic (1992) wrote that managers and leaders are very different kinds of people, differing in their motivation, personal history, and how they think and act. Bennis and Nanus (1985 p21) proposed that ‘managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right thing’. Many of the distinctions made tend to denigrate management as the poor relation to leadership, a harsh and unfair judgement on countless individuals designated as managers. O’Connell (2005), for example, in a further education setting interpreted management as administration, reinforcing the status quo, implementing legislation, operating routine processes, handling difficulties and running meetings. He claimed, however, not to perceive management as a pejorative term, rather a worthy, necessary, but uninspiring activity.

Other academics (for example, Bass 1990, Mintzberg 1973), although they perceive leadership and management to be distinct processes, have allowed for individuals to practise both. Definitions vary with Mintzberg (1973), for example, describing leadership as one of his ten managerial roles. He perceives leadership as motivating subordinates and creating favourable conditions for undertaking work. His other nine roles involve distinct managerial responsibilities (for example, resource allocation, negotiation) but leadership is viewed as an essential managerial role that pervades the other roles.

There is no agreed definition of leadership, whether or not it is compared to management. There are many facets to the phenomenon including the traits and behaviours of leaders, the way leaders influence others, the role of followers, and the outcomes of successful leadership. Stogdill (1974 p259) undertook an

extensive review of the literature and famously concluded that ‘there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept’. Yukl (2006) questions the usefulness of attempts to define management and leadership as distinct roles, processes, or relationships. He believes this may be counterproductive if simplistic theories about effective leadership should result.

The researcher, having reflected on the literature and his own eighteen years’ experience of leadership and management, believes that a distinction can be drawn between the two concepts. The comparison of the two phenomena is useful because it contributes to a fuller understanding of the meaning of leadership. Nevertheless, neither leadership nor management can be defined in absolute terms. Grint (2005 p18) correctly accepts that leadership is an ‘essentially contested concept’. Yukl (2006 p8) rightly desists from a search for a ‘correct’ definition of leadership. He prefers to use the various concepts ‘as a source of different perspectives on a complex, multifaceted phenomenon’.

According to findings from literature, leadership may have evaded precise definition, but it is nevertheless possible to identify its key facets. These facets can be assembled into a model of leadership, which will then enable an informed exploration of the phenomenon in the real world of a college of further education.

2.15.1 Summary

The terms leadership and management can be seen as two separate activities, for example, some academic scholars argue that you cannot be a good manager and a good leader at the same time.

Bennis and Nanus (1985) define management as accomplishing activities and mastering routines, while to lead means to influence others and create a vision for change.

Rost (1991) asserts that leadership is a multidirectional influence relationship; management is a unidirectional authority relationship.

Zaleznik (1992) argues that management and leadership required different types of people.

However, Burke (1986 p68) argues the point that while there is a difference between leadership and management, the two roles are intrinsically linked to achieve organisational goals. For example, when managers are involved in influencing individuals or groups of employees to meet its goals, they are operating under leadership and when leaders are involved in aspects such as planning or organising staffing, they are operating within management.

For the purpose of this case study, leadership and management are defined somewhat differently; however, it is still understood that one individual can work efficiently in mastering both fields.

As stated earlier the definition of leadership in the process where an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal is critical in the role of curriculum middle manager. Leadership and management share common ground for example leadership and management involves influencing, working with people, and working to strategic goals.

Curriculum middle managers' roles in educational institutions are critical to the success of the organisation. It is well documented that this role involves being both a policy implementer and change maker. It is these two key areas where the curriculum middle managers' leadership role becomes critical and the effectiveness of the individual in this role is scrutinised to measure impact. In this section, the researcher will explore the drivers and barriers, which curriculum middle managers have to negotiate whilst leading their curriculum teams.

2.16 Drivers and barriers which impact on leadership at middle management level

2.16.1 Communication

From the researcher's extensive experience within the further education sector, communication permeates every aspect of leadership and management and within the further education sector; there are many layers of staff who need to be communicated with. The method and style of communicating to staff can impede or facilitate clear communication. Leaders and managers are required to use a range of methods for example; team meetings, emails, individual meetings and so on in order to provide a platform to discuss and share information. The leader's style of engaging with academic staff to seek their views and comments is of paramount importance – this should create an environment of openness and genuinely value staff opinions, embracing staff ideas when shaping policy or practice and most importantly ensuring the intended outcome is clearly established. In addition, this also allows the leader to use their non-verbal communication skills such as eye contact and body language to reinforce the message. As previously stated in this chapter, curriculum middle managers not communicating a clear message to teachers in the classroom can result in a misunderstanding leading to confusion. For example, it could be argued that colleges with financial difficulties may permeate a culture of teachers recruiting students on the premise of 'bums on seats' and ignoring the importance of 'right learner right course'.

Effective communication is essential for effective leadership and management (Coleman and Glover 2010). Furthermore, Ofsted inspection reports over the last ten years have reported that good communication in leadership and management has resulted in colleges making rapid improvements. For example, 'leaders and managers articulate the vision and strategy clearly and staff at all levels of the organisation share this understanding.' However, poor communication leads to a fragmented approach leading to a culture of blame and lack of accountability.

Therefore, Jones (2005) argues that curriculum middle managers need to take extra care to communicate effectively, even though it takes time.

Getting the right message is vital - and if team members understanding of issues are unclear, they often feel insecure and this may lead to conflict. To avoid such issues, the need for regular staff briefings with a clear and focussed agenda in order to inform the team of priorities, progress and policies is critical. This sharing of information supports a more inclusive culture. Furthermore, from experience, it empowers teaching staff to innovate, put forward ideas for teaching and fosters a culture of trust and openness.

Coleman and Glover (2010 p57) point out that curriculum middle managers need to be consistent with messages and communication barriers need to be avoided such as:

- Hearing what we want to hear;
- Ignoring conflicting information;
- Being aware of our perceptions of the communicator;
- Recognising that words mean different things to different people; and
- Acknowledging that there is often little awareness and understanding about non-verbal communication.

Effective curriculum middle managers need to be effective communicators with both individuals and groups. It is imperative that messages are validated or triangulated by middle managers to ensure staff have a clear understanding of what is required and their role within this process. Therefore, communication is about both content (the message) and process (action).

Handy (1993 p47) suggests that managers need to take additional steps to avoid failure by:

- Using more than one communication net or group.
- Encouraging two-way rather than one-way communications.
- Keeping a few links in the communication chain as possible.

Handy supports the approach for triangulating the effectiveness of the communication process and furthermore provides the opportunity for the curriculum middle manager to reinforce and evaluate staff understanding in order to ensure a college-wide approach is established resulting in the organisations' strategic values and operational strategies being consistently understood by all staff.

2.16.2 Summary

Effective college communication is critical for effective leadership and management. Academics define communication as a complex process, which is taken for granted and that many leaders and managers assume that they are natural communicators (Jones 2005). Poor communication in educational institutions leads to a sense of lack of direction, a divided staff team, a culture of not dealing with issues openly and the failure to implement change consistently across an organisation (Armstrong 1994 p36). In further education colleges, it is important to reflect Ofsted's findings that at outstanding and good colleges all staff within the organisations have a clear understanding of the strategic vision and work collectively to address underperformance. Furthermore, Coleman and Glover (2010) recommend that educational leaders and managers need to carefully reflect on their communication styles and methods to ensure staff buy in at all levels of the organisation is achieved. Therefore, clarity is vital in the communication process to avoid ambiguity and misinterpretation.

The need to validate the impact of communication is also necessary to reinforce the message objective. The use of non-verbal communication skills such as eye contact and body language can further strengthen the magnitude of communication dialogue. The dichotomy for curriculum middle managers may result in one hand, having to communicate the senior management team's

strategic messages *downwards* to team members but conversely, teaching and support staff expect curriculum delivery issues to be addressed *upwards*, in order to ensure that the learner experience is given top priority. Prioritising the key messages from senior leaders and interfacing with teaching and support staff to implement policy change or address underperformance will require the curriculum middle manager to robustly plan the content and process of his or her communication approach to ensure successful outcomes are achieved.

2.17 Performance management

Policy-makers and government educational departments are keen to use the performance management tool to improve the education system, raise levels of attainment and to increase the accountability of teachers in the classroom. Whilst this concept is not unreasonable, there is no general consensus of a single framework, which supports a single performance management process. In addition, there is limited literature relating to performance management within schools and colleges (Coleman and Glover 2010).

Performance management within the further education sector is becoming an accepted process to hold accountable managers at all levels of the organisation. A small number of colleges have appointed Principals and senior post holders on commercial contracts, which are linked directly to the performance of the organisation. The introduction of performance management contracts at senior post holders' level could be argued to further support the government position that colleges are businesses and should be treated no differently from the world of business and commerce. The impact of such changes can result in curriculum middle managers having to agree goals and targets for growth and quality improvement scores with little or no discussion. Furthermore, from the researchers past experience, the beneficiaries of performance related pay often appear to be senior managers; however, it is the curriculum middle managers who are collectively tasked to achieve strategic goals.

From the researcher's experience and analysis of posts advertised for curriculum middle managers, it appears that the vast majority of these jobs are *not* performance pay related. This appears to target and motivate senior leaders within the organisation, without detailed consideration being given to middle managers' role in implementing change and achieving the desired outcomes. Accountability grounded at programme level can be complex in light of several tutors teaching on the same qualification and agreeing targets at the outset. For example, each teacher may have a different style of teaching and may not value education as a commercially driven product. Some teachers and middle managers argue that education cannot be treated as a commercial product in light of all learners having different starting points.

Coleman and Glover (2010) identify performance management becoming a major element in leadership within the education sector. However, they acknowledge that this phenomenon is new and untested and largely depends upon the culture in which it operates. Coleman and Glover (2010 p52) support the notion that performance management 'is mainly for purposes of accountability.' This stance is further supported when analysing senior managers' performance-related pay terms and conditions. For example, a leader's salary may have an entitlement of 10% related to performance of the organisation (this being reflected in the individual's annual appraisal). This whole process of introducing a system of payment by results depends on this style of the leader, and the context of target setting. Bush and Middlewood (2005) highlight the problems associated with measuring student outcomes:

- There is variation in context between and within schools and colleges.
- The differences in teacher effectiveness in working with differing students.
- 'The lack of understanding of the process of effective evaluation especially where insufficient time is allowed for reflection' (Bush and Middlewood 2005 p89).

This is evidenced in the current educational sector with such examples as, internal target setting contributing to the educational organisation as measured by Ofsted, requiring a quantitative approach, whilst educational success of students informing league tables requiring a quantitative framework. Within the further education sector, student performance is measured by Qualification Achievement Rate or QAR (formerly Qualification Success Rate - QSR), qualifications leading to progression and the quality of teaching and learning. Furthermore, performance is measured from an individual starting point; this allows a far more realistic target being set for the individual student to achieve.

Whilst in schools it is well documented that performance overall is measured by the volume of good GCSE grades. For example, five A*- C grades including maths and English being the benchmark.

Further analysis of performance management and its potential impact highlights what Jennings and Lomas (2003) argue:

- Creating a closer linkage between school and management systems.
- Developing processes and strategies that improved management practice and in raising standards in the classroom.
- Enhancing target setting and review procedures.
- Engineering a rapprochement between the stakeholders to bridge, the divide between the conflicting views about the purposes appraisal and performance management systems for personal development, performance monitoring and reward. (Jennings and Lomas 2003 p370).

Reflecting on Jennings and Lomas' stance, one could argue that this supports top-down target setting to meet local authority or government objectives in driving up standards of teaching to improve student outcomes. However, Cutler and Waine (2004) argue that there is tension between student achievement and professional development when there is a top-down setting target process. For example, there is a lack of freedom to determine individual objectives and an

assumption that all staff will buy into this process. Cutler and Waine (2004) warn that this approach is fraught with issues both in motivational terms and a possible negative impact on outcomes.

Coleman and Glover (2010) argue that:

‘Improvements in educational organisations systems occur when people are involved and recognise that there is a need for a change of viewpoint or procedure. This leads to individual ownership, opposition is minimised and staff are motivated to fulfil their roles leading to outcomes in enhance for students’ (Coleman and Glover 2010 p97).

This further supports the view that a whole organisation approach with staff buy-in at all levels is far more productive to enhance student outcomes. In this process, staff have an opportunity to discuss and feel valued. Therefore, the curriculum middle managers’ role potentially becomes far less problematic when agreeing staff targets. These targets then can be further negotiated and documented in a reflective performance review, supporting a successful leadership of an educational department.

2.17.1 Summary

Performance management is a new concept being introduced in educational organisations. To date there is little evidence to demonstrate student outcomes being the beneficiary. Over the last five years, some senior leaders of educational organisations in England have been appointed on employment contracts that are linked to performance related pay. It is unclear if the performance related pay is based on qualitative or quantitative achievements or both. However, it is unequivocally clear that senior managers responsible for curriculum middle managers set targets for departments and individuals to improve student outcomes. The degree of negotiation with middle managers is difficult to determine, however, these managers are expected to hold teachers accountable for their performance and address poor performance. Student outcomes are reliant on a number of factors.

Bush and Middlewood (2005) and Cutler and Waine (2001) argue that student outcomes are based on multifaceted issues. For example, students having different educational starting points. However, there is general consensus that performance management is required to eradicate poor teaching in schools and colleges (Ofsted 2012).

Analysing further education colleges who were graded outstanding between September 2012 and July 2015, Ofsted recognised robust performance management systems being an effective tool to eradicate poor performance and rapidly address declining student outcomes. Glover and Middlewood (2010 p132) remind us that 'working together in educational institutions is the most positive way of improving student outcomes'. Therefore, performance management processes must not be mechanistic and fail to recognise and value staff contribution to raise standards of teaching and learning. Curriculum middle managers need to embrace the concept of appraising their teachers in order to raise standards to improve student outcomes (by valuing their staff when negotiating targets in performance management processes).

In addition, the devolved targets from a strategic point of view need to be quantifiable, realistic and agreed with all stakeholders. Whilst there is no single consensus or framework for a performance management process, Chapman and Cartner (2008) suggest there are several critical conditions necessary for successful performance management:

- A climate of high aspirations and standards led by managers but shared by all staff.
- An open, transparent set of procedures secured by involvement and consent.
- Clear targets for teams and individuals based on robust data and derived from college targets (top-down) and locally identified improvements (bottom-up).

- Training, development and support for managers especially middle managers.
- Training that nurtures the ability of managers to have frank, supportive and professional discussion about performance.
- Systematic monitoring of individual performance.
- Challenges to underperformance accompanied by training and support.
- Willingness to take further action where underperformance persists.
- Celebration of the individual and collective achievements of staff.

From the researcher's experience, the above framework requires a culture of high expectations and the willingness to embrace business practice in a sector, which is deep rooted in the ideology that education is not a product and therefore, is protected from the world of business. The need for curriculum middle managers being skilled enough to challenge colleagues and systematically and consistently apply a performance management process is important. This then needs to be supported by senior leaders to foster a culture in which all staff are valued and contribute to the organisational goals.

2.18 Professional development and training – curriculum middle managers

As previously stated, further education colleges have to now operate within a business model to ensure financial viability. They must demonstrate that quality standards of teaching and learning are improving in order to ensure that student outcomes are also improving. This has resulted in the curriculum middle managers' role being heavily relied upon to implement policy change and secure quality improvement outcomes. Curriculum middle managers often experience senior leadership and departmental pressures (Briggs 2005) and are therefore exposed to market pressures. Whilst curriculum middle managers have autonomy, the target driven working environment requires the individual to develop skills and experiences to deal with strategic and operational matters.

Many curriculum middle managers are promoted into post with little or no management qualifications, as this is often not a requirement in the job description for the role. Often these managers are outstanding teachers in the classroom who 'go the extra mile', for example, willing to develop new qualifications, represent the college externally, are willing to pilot new initiatives etc. Senior managers seized on these qualities to point these individuals to the post of curriculum middle managers.

The researcher has witnessed this practice and also noted that there are no discussion or support mechanisms to support individuals when appointing curriculum middle managers. Therefore, surprisingly many further education colleges provide little or no formal training. The only training issued typically relates to Health and Safety, Equality and Diversity and so on. However, some further education institutions have recognised the need to collectively support middle managers to embed the strategic vision and improve staff buy-in. This is because the senior managers accept that some curriculum middle managers implement strategic change (being fully committed to the new process), while others may have doubts - therefore these managers tend to take up a defensive approach and some will embrace this change (but interpret/overlay their own educational values). This results in the organisation failing to systematically embed strategic changes.

There is limited research on professional development for educational middle managers. However, over the last ten years increased emphasis has been placed on high quality leadership being the key to a successful educational organisation (Bush and Jackson, 2002). In line with this, Ofsted's heightened focus on leadership and management being fundamental in raising standards in educational institutions has forced the further education sector to identify leadership and management programmes to support staff with the necessary knowledge and skills in raising standards of teaching and learning in order to improve student outcomes. Whilst this resulted in formal programmes of staff development to support senior managers, surprisingly there are no nationally

recognised academic or curriculum middle manager staff development programmes. Furthermore, whilst there is significant literature available reflecting leadership as a generic activity, for example styles of leadership, there is very limited research regarding how curriculum middle managers should develop in order to learn to lead.

The Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL) was established in 2003 to 'ensure world-class leadership within learning and skills sector by 2010' (www.lums.lancs.ac.uk/leadership/cel) and support the further education colleges through the research and development of professional development programmes. This resulted in a senior leadership programme being developed for aspiring Principals and future sector leaders. However, the failure to establish a similar programme for curriculum middle managers resulted in these first tier managers being left to negotiate and secure their own staff development training. From the researcher's perspective, clearly this was a missed opportunity for the further education sector to establish a nationally recognised programme of staff development for curriculum middle managers. Furthermore, in 2010 the Centre for Excellence in Leadership was dissolved due to financial constraints. This unfortunately, further reflects the further education sector's failure to build on the senior leadership programme and questions the longevity and commitment of the sector to raise standards of teaching and learning to improve student outcomes.

Research entitled '*Developing Middle Leaders*' undertaken by the Centre for Excellence in Leadership (March 2007) stated that:

'Not only are middle leaders the senior managers of tomorrow, but they are also strategically important in their current role of managing, leading and implementing organisational change programmes' (Collinson 2007 p35).

Furthermore, this research conducted for different further education colleges focused on middle leader development being intrinsically linked with quality improvement initiatives concluded that:

1. The investment in coaching (as a way of developing middle managers) enabled a solution-focused coaching programme to improve classroom outcomes and also allowed individuals to use solution-focused techniques outside the classroom.
2. A talent development programme found that staff valued the opportunity for reflection on emotional intelligence, which enabled them to grow into the leadership role. This enabled sharing good practice and participating in curriculum initiatives.
3. A competence-based framework to support the development of middle managers resulted in a portfolio-building exercise rather than performance improvements and in some cases made staff feel undervalued and defensive.
4. An internally devised middle management training programme needs to focus on developing whole teams rather than individually promoted staff. The research outcomes identified that middle management programmes tend to concentrate on developing high-level technical expertise rather than leadership skills for managing diverse teams across curriculum areas.

Collinson (2007) concluded that senior managers supported a solution-focused coaching process as a key component in developing a self-regulatory model of quality improvement. He also argued that the main success factor in outstanding colleges is the recognition of the critical role of middle managers and the strong emphasis in developing these middle leaders.

Therefore, when appointing curriculum middle managers, it is imperative to provide support by assessing against a leadership framework of knowledge to identify a programme of professional training. Identifying and agreeing a

framework around leadership is difficult in light of many facets associated with leadership in the world of work.

2.18.1 Summary

There are a number of key messages for the need to develop curriculum middle managers' leadership skills and knowledge. Many curriculum middle managers have no formal qualifications and the lack of a nationally recognised development and training programme further exacerbates the dilemma middle managers find themselves in. Collinson (2007) clearly highlights the need for senior managers to support middle managers' knowledge base to raise standards of teaching and learning. The leadership role as a person, process, position and results are key fundamentals, which need to be developed when appointing curriculum middle managers. Whilst it is difficult to imagine a national programme for curriculum middle managers being developed in the very near future, it is vitally important for senior managers to expose current and future curriculum middle managers to experience the challenges faced in the role of middle management.

2.19 Ofsted's voice on curriculum middle managers

Often teachers are heavily scrutinised during Ofsted inspections through the lesson observation process. These observations largely contribute to the Ofsted inspection report for the organisation with supporting evidence around leadership and management bringing about rapid and sustained improvements. In more recent times, 2012 – 2015, the focus of Ofsted inspections largely remains on the activity in the classroom. However, there has been a shift in holding accountable college leaders and managers at all levels of the organisation in promoting better teaching and learning. Ofsted inspectors in particular focus on:

- How well leaders, managers and governors pursue excellence, modelling professional standards in all of their work.
- The effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation and the extent to which it is shared with governors.

- The use of performance management and effectiveness of strategies for improving teaching.
- How well leaders and managers ensure that the curriculum is of high quality.
- How well leaders and managers demonstrate the capacity to bring about further improvement (Ofsted handbook 2012 p41).

Good curriculum middle managers undertake the above-mentioned activity in order to raise standards within the organisation, thus leading to student outcomes improving. Furthermore, Ofsted inspectors do not prescribe what is good or outstanding teaching and learning, the most important aspect of this is that students are making tangible progress in their learning. Therefore, curriculum middle managers have the freedom to innovate and explore teaching and learning techniques, which motivate, engage and stretch student learning to raise standards.

In 2011/12 Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw stated that:

'If England is to compete with the very best, then strong leadership is absolutely critical... When I look at any inspection report, my eyes are always drawn to comments on leadership because leaders are the key people in changing and improving the culture and performance of the organisation leaders provide the role models for the rest of the institution'.

Ofsted describe an outstanding curriculum middle manager as someone who is doing more than managing a subject or an aspect of school or college life. In order for curriculum middle managers to be outstanding, they must embark on difficult and challenging aspects of leadership. For example, vision, strategy and a drive towards improvement. Ofsted's 2013 report '*Getting It Right First Time*', stated that:

'Effective leaders have a clear vision of what they are trying to achieve. They are absolutely determined to get it right first time and to give learners in their settings the very best start. They have high expectations of children and adults alike: this is a hallmark of their work' (Ofsted 2013 p76).

Ofsted's findings in schools and colleges which were graded *Requires Improvement* or *Inadequate* highlighted that too often senior leaders do not have high expectations of middle leaders or offer them enough support; there is a failure by some senior leaders to translate rhetoric about the importance of subject leadership into real practice. Senior leaders need to ensure that middle and leaders are given the skills and confidence to promote improvement. Some middle leaders are focused on checking coverage of curriculum or presentation of work rather than in evaluating pupils' performance and reviewing the quality of teaching. In these cases, senior leaders need to work with their middle leaders to promote more effective practice.

There are many good teachers who are hard-working and committed day in and day out. However, a dysfunctional educational organisation (due to weak leadership) results in uncoordinated and ineffective practices, which waste resources and staff energies, thus resulting in no improvements. At the launch of the latest Ofsted Handbook Sir Michael Wilshaw (September 2012) stated that 'I am not interested in new buildings and wonderful policies, give me good teachers'. This focus further consolidated Ofsted's view of leaders and managers in schools and colleges improving the quality of teaching and learning, which resulted in improved life chances of students.

2.19.1 Summary

Ofsted view middle management leadership to be critical to raise standards of teaching and learning to improve student outcomes. However, they recognise the need for senior leaders to set high expectations and support middle managers with effective practice. In addition, curriculum middle managers are often given autonomy, although there is very little support for individuals to develop their skills. Often curriculum middle managers learn from 'on the job' training and there is little support from senior managers.

During Ofsted inspections, curriculum middle managers play a vital role in planning and overseeing the Ofsted inspection process. For example,

demonstrating the impact of processes and systems which enhance teaching and learning (and thus result in the improvement in student outcomes). The failure to demonstrate tangible improvements or allowing the Ofsted process to overwhelm the individual has resulted in curriculum middle managers being removed from post following the inspection. The only support provided to curriculum middle managers is normally from the Ofsted nominee. Therefore, the assumption that a curriculum middle manager has the necessary presentation and communication skills can result in some instances colleges being underprepared.

2.20 Chapter summary and questions arising from the literature review

This literature review has focused on the phenomenon of curriculum middle managers' practice in further education sector and their leadership role in improving standards of quality. The relentless approach from government departments to raise standards of student success and the gaining of meaningful employment has resulted in curriculum middle managers being critical policy implementers and change makers. This unwavering approach from all stakeholders is now sharply focusing on curriculum middle managers' impact.

Defining leadership in the context of middle managers for this study, the researcher would describe this as:

'A process of influencing others, goal setting and achievement, motivating people, maximising performance, creating an environment to achieve outcomes and marshalling efforts of all to achieve set organisational goals.'

Key issues from the literature are:

1. Curriculum middle managers are key to implement policy change and make changes at shop floor level.
2. Curriculum middle managers need to be fully embraced within the college management structure to value their contribution more broadly.
3. Curriculum middle managers are pivotal in addressing quality underperformance.

4. Curriculum middle managers are highly competent teachers who require mentoring and dedicated support from cross-college departments.
5. Leadership practice of curriculum middle managers will differ to reflect previous experiences of other managers and organisational cultures.
6. Curriculum middle managers have to distil the difference between leadership and management activities.
7. External stake holders view leadership as being the critical component to address poor quality performance.
8. Communication processes are the foundations, which underpin organisational values and cultures.
9. Curriculum middle managers far too often are not exposed to external market forces and are totally inward facing managers.
10. Curriculum middle managers operate in a distributed leadership framework.

2.21 Critical analysis of the literature review

From this literature review, findings demonstrate that the current landscape, within which further education permeates, requires curriculum middle managers to have a wide-ranging set of skills in which to operate successfully. Not only will managers need to see their curriculum areas as a commercial enterprise (where course promotion, growth, viability and financial contribution are “king”), but also they must manage their areas to meet external review expectations such as Ofsted whilst never falling short of ensuring that the vast majority of learners are retained and achieve their qualification. With Quality and Finance often appearing at the opposite ends of that continuum, managers need to feel confident, supported and able to take the risks they feel will pay off. Critically the role needs to demonstrate high levels of skills and understanding in terms of how to prioritise their own work and how to support this skill with their staff

In the critical analysis of the literature review, together with the researchers own experience of the case study college, this section puts forward new knowledge and thinking around a model for curriculum leadership, which firmly addresses

the findings in the researchers literature review. The new proposed model, see Figure 2 (below), further underpins the theoretical model.

The review distils ten key considerations, which inform the proposed new model for curriculum middle managers to leadership and quality improvement practice.

2.21.1 Curriculum middle managers are key to the implementation of policy change and make changes on the shop floor level

Whilst within this literature review the various academics have largely defined the position of leadership as an art of leading individuals to achieve a set of goals to meet organisational ambitions, this model is well understood in the commercial commerce and private sectors.

Within the public education sector, the researcher accepts this model however; it is often in its implementation where things go astray. The notion that curriculum middle managers should be given those goals and ambitions and expected to simply find a way to meet them, is flawed. The research and literature review has established that many curriculum middle managers have the skills set of a competent classroom teacher, and not one necessarily cut out for leadership. In the further education sector then, such expectations and demands are contentious, failing to consider the context of the sector and the nature of person entrusted to get the job done.

The proposed model presents a desire to accept that the conventional model is not fit for purpose and curriculum middle managers would be best utilised specifically where their skills set would be fully utilised, which of course is within those aspects specifically related to teaching, learning and assessment. Rather than diluting this focus with the requirement for curriculum middle managers to operate mini businesses, their role must be firmly rooted in all things pertinent to core business only, namely the learner experience, progress and attainment within their department. To support this move, the senior leadership must re-think the role, separating the need to be accountable for example, for recruitment. This

is one simple example to help alleviate the pressure on time and energy of the curriculum middle manager. Such targets to recruit and duties to interview ought to be conducted by staff appointed or have remission to conduct these roles. In schools for example, tutors themselves are far less associated with recruitment targets and indeed financial targets. Largely their role and the expectations of them is to ensure that those pupils who enrolled, make good progress and achieve their full potential.

A new wave of thinking for a further education college would be to invest in specific roles to support such demands as growth and commercial enterprise, allowing the curriculum middle managers to make greater impact on the quality of the learner's experience. Currently, it is not uncommon for a middle manager to be teaching Level 2 Art in the morning and in the afternoon attend a meeting at the college's governor resource committee to look at the financial viability of part-time commercial dance provision. The proposed new model would not allow such a diversity of role.

In order to fund this new approach, curriculum middle managers teaching could increase by around three hours per week, creating the room to invest in cross-college roles to take the pressure off them in relation to, for example, recruitment and commercial enterprise. Teaching is clearly falling within their skill set and what is actually left as 'management time' is allowed as specific.

To offer a further illustration of this, one cross-college commercial manager would be used effectively to support around fifteen curriculum middle managers and would themselves manage the commercial expectations and budget lines. Such a model then would allow the curriculum middle manager to more effectively focus on the quality of learner experience as well as their attainment levels.

This model is often reflected well in the world of apprenticeships, whereby a well-trained and informed sales team can go ahead and successfully recruit students,

allowing the trainer / assessors to focus upon the quality aspects once students are active.

In the researcher's current employment at an FE college (which is not the case-study college), there is a clear example of the researcher's new learning regarding the pressures around the breadth of expectations upon curriculum middle managers. The researcher being able to implement a new model for tutorial, whereby a cross-college tutorial manager has been employed to devise the model, resources, liaise with tutors and to coordinate delivery and cross-college activities, therefore taking away such additional demands from curriculum middle managers, demonstrates this.

2.21.2 Curriculum middle managers need to be fully embraced within the college management structure to value their contribution

As discussed in the literature review, a successful organisation is one that values contribution from all staff members within the organisation. This allows staff at all levels to make a valued contribution that can be embraced by senior leaders to make further improvements. The researcher acknowledges that many organisations embrace this model as a template of good practice; however, in reality this model is not one being deployed within the further education sector. The researcher argues this point acknowledging that it is more common for senior and executive leadership to pay attention to a college growth agenda or government funding policy changes for example. The pursuit of so-called 'vanity projects' often take president over listening to the college workforce and trying harder to meet their needs. The financial constraints within further education colleges sit completely at odds with the relentless drive for instant quality improvement outcomes. Therefore, this results in a top-down culture and the failure of senior leadership teams to fully embrace the curriculum middle managers values and thus resulting in these critical staff being devalued.

Furthermore, the researcher positions himself to argue that senior leadership teams within the further education sector need to adopt a different model of

practice in how they listen and take on board the views of curriculum middle managers. This rich body of experience upon the classroom floor is incredibly important but often overlooked. In the case study college for example, the curriculum middle managers did not ever have an audience with the senior management team denying a wealth of potential initiative to secure genuine improvements for the college.

Moreover, morale was increasingly damaged where, for example, senior leaders would pursue sector accolades rather than address concerns from staff feedback and surveys. The new proposed model would place amongst the highest of strategic leadership ambitions, to see curriculum middle managers at the heart of quality improvements. To this end for example, the new model will see curriculum middle managers in formal regular attendance with the senior leadership team who would be present to listen and to address concerns and support where necessary.

2.21.3 Curriculum middle managers are pivotal in addressing quality underperformance

Embracing Robinson's, (2007) suggestion and Ofsted's position of curriculum middle managers being pivotal in bringing about quality improvement changes in the classroom. The researcher accepts both of these positions; however, Ofsted's position sometimes fails to address the prevailing context within the college environment and the failure to accept the financial challenges the college are having to operate within. Furthermore, the OFSTED model of leadership for outstanding and good colleges is underpinned by the notion that further education colleges' fundamental role is to ensure all students receive and achieve the best possible outcome.

Therefore, the researcher argues the austerity-operating environment is hampering and stifling curriculum middle managers' ambition to embed a sustainable quality improvement model, which allows adequate time for teaching

staff on the shop floor to bring about tangible and sustainable improvements for the future.

The new model, whilst accepting that austerity very much sets the scene for the sector, would see senior leadership teams understanding that unless tangible support for classroom improvements is in place, then the curriculum middle managers cannot be expected to secure dramatic improvements where required. With this acceptance from senior leadership, would come a renewed energy and drive to think creatively of ways to secure the support necessary. An example of this new model in practice comes from the researcher's current FE College whereby a small but dedicated team of admin assistance have been secured to monitor internal quality assurance indicators and to alert curriculum managers when in-year quality alerts are spotted. In many ways this takes a great deal of pressure from curriculum middle managers who can rarely find the time to trawl through on-line assessment tools, attendance reports and termly reviews or target setting etc. The partnership between the quality admin team and the curriculum middle managers is one of a collegial model, with a single shared goal to improve learner experience and attainment. As such, there is a renewed sense of support and a move away from a blame culture within the college.

The proposed model is directly related to the researcher's findings within the case study college where there was little support in place for curriculum middle managers thereby creating unrealistic expectations of them to secure improvements in the classroom or the development required for tutors. The proposed model for FE outlines a critical need for colleges to invest in opportunities for tutors who are non-managers, to demonstrate their worth in leading on those ambitions. A simple model of remission of two hours a week would not only help to develop tutors into potential management roles, but would also remove some dramatic demands currently placed upon curriculum middle managers.

If for example, the colleges observation team were made up of tutors on remission rather than of curriculum middle managers, this would remove a huge burden and afford renewed opportunities for curriculum middle managers to get involved in the development of tutors rather than in merely making judgements of cross-college teaching practice sometimes divorced from their own area and the targets set for them to improve achievements rates in their own area. Spending, often, four hours a week observing then writing the reports and feedback, is actually work which does not feature in their Personal Development reviews or indeed the target set for their curriculum area. It is a fortunate spin off that tutors would finally see an opportunity for their expertise to be recognised without the need for them to become a college manager.

2.21.4 Curriculum middle managers are highly competent teachers who require mentoring and dedicated support from cross-college departments

It is very clear from the literature review that curriculum middle managers are highly competent teachers who are then promoted to the role of curriculum middle managers. It is also clearly established then that there is a gap of organisational understanding around what is required to support this transition more effectively. With the role of the curriculum middle manager expanding exponentially over the last ten years, this has become a significant factor where lack of manager performance is noted.

The researcher therefore argues that a new model of transitional support is imperative together with a refreshed set of assessment criteria used when selecting the managerial attributes of applicant to the role. The model would see that prior to the appointment of a curriculum middle manager, there is a clear training needs analysis carried out which will inform and put a robust and bespoke support programme to enable the individual to make the transition more successfully. This will see that colleges follow a similar pattern to the school compulsory sector where there are Curriculum Middle Manager programmes that all curriculum middle managers undertake as part of their appointment to the role. In addition, this will also potentially eliminate the increasing phenomenon of

curriculum middle managers resigning early into their role due to not being fully prepared or supported to meet senior management expectations.

2.21.5 Leadership practice of curriculum middle managers will differ to reflect previous experiences of other managers and organisational cultures

A very large percentage of teachers and lecturers in recent years enter into FE teaching direct from various other vocations and industries. Therefore, their previous experience in the private or public sector provides these individuals with an insight into different organisational structures and cultures. The researcher argues that it is this previous experience, which they draw upon when appointed in the role of curriculum middle manager that shapes their leadership practice. Therefore, whilst the model has already stated that teachers need additional support and mentors to transition into management, on top of this it is also imperative to recognise for example that those from, say, the public services sector, will arrive with a very different perception of leadership than colleagues from the performing arts sector. Each of these managers will have had a range of experiences that lead into their style of management however, neither, it could be argued, are fully ready and able to apply this successfully within the educational setting. This then informs an enhanced model of supplementary training at the start of their employment as a manager which seeks to embrace the qualities, which work well within the FE sector and address those, which do not.

The model will therefore fully support curriculum middle managers through a dedicated bespoke training programme to build upon their previous knowledge base and experience to ensure the college's strategic goals can be achieved.

2.21.6 Curriculum middle managers have to distil the difference between leadership and management activities

The literature review has outlined the difference between leadership and management activities. The researcher agrees that there is a significant

difference in the interpretation of leadership and management, and therefore unless senior leadership teams are able to define what this means to them in the FE setting, it will rarely be understood and embraced effectively by the college curriculum middle manager.

It is clear that at times, curriculum middle managers are required to demonstrate leadership skills. They cannot achieve this unless the senior leadership team has firstly understood this need and secondly allowed empowerment for them to provide that leadership. With an increased expectation for curriculum middle managers to be accountable, the new proposed model will celebrate clear parameters for curriculum middle managers to exercise their leadership practice. This model is opposed to the current convention of curriculum middle managers being told exactly what and how to do things on an operational level.

Leadership is almost impossible within that climate where autonomy is stripped away and compliance is the order of the day. The proposed model will place increasing trust and autonomy in curriculum middle managers, empowering them to make leadership decisions, which in turn will offer greater job satisfaction and pride in their ability to make a difference. Senior leadership parameters rather than restrictive directions would enable curriculum middle managers to work within a framework and be judged on the outcomes of their endeavours rather than on their levels of compliance.

The new proposed model for curriculum middle managers would ensure that the transitional training and on-job mentorship programme would include guidance on what that organisation constitutes leadership and what represents management, supporting an increased awareness of what and when either are necessary. The support would reiterate the organisations commitment that it understands that curriculum middle managers at times will need to demonstrate skills in both domains and scope and autonomy will be afforded for this to take place where necessary.

2.21.7 External stakeholders view leadership as being a critical component to address the poor quality performance

There is a clear expectation from government and funding agencies and OFSTED that college leadership and management teams are there to ensure poor performance is tackled head-on, and addressed appropriately.

In principle, there is little reason to disagree with regarding this notion however; one important factor appears to be contradict the whole phenomena of addressing poor performance from the external stakeholder bodies. The researcher argues that funding cuts and rapid quality improvement practices are not compatible with the need to remain dedicated and committed to addressing poor performance. Effective performance management requires an organisational and cultural mind shift, to make quality improvement a top agenda item, it is imperative for quality improvement to owned by everyone in the organisation and not simply 'the management'. Therefore, there is a need for a collective agreement that the highest of standards are viewed as the normal standard, and as embedded by all as a cultural practice that is a central part of the organisation's DNA. This, in reality, requires a significant amount of resources and additional support if all individuals are to be inspired to consistently aim for excellence. Once again, a top down edict from senior leadership (to aspire for excellence) coupled with an aggressive approach to performance management, will not achieve excellence in an FE college setting. Such approaches rapidly see the loss of good will working and the 'extra-mile' approach will decline.

To address this then, the new proposed model aims to secure a cultural shift in thinking so that everyone in the organisation, regardless of role or level, feel very much part of a collective drive towards excellence. They become passionate stakeholders in the success of the college and not driven by external forces or indeed made to feel intimidated by internal ones. A culture where staff consistently strive to improve their practice as driven by intrinsic motivation would also take away huge pressures and burdens upon college curriculum middle

managers who too often are expected to operate within a compliance and non-trust environment.

This aspect of the proposed new model for leadership is perhaps the most challenging of all and underpins all of the other aspects of the model. The research shows at every stage that the culture of the organisation is adding to the issues that the curriculum middle managers are facing. There is clear indication therefore, that once a culture of trust, camaraderie and team spirit is finally established, then many of the operational problems would be dealt with as one team, with no blame and in a rapid manner without further unnecessary escalation. The proposed model starts with the clear commitment to 'Talent Attraction' but then follows through with 'Engagement, Performance, Development and Growth, Reward and Recognition, Wellbeing and Diversity and Inclusion'. These terms must be brought to life in the organisation through a measurable commitment to the staff, which in time will generate the culture of 'one team, working together'.

The new model will offer a different slant on top down leadership, and in fact, it will be those senior leaders failing to create and generate the new culture, that will be challenged accordingly.

The new model for senior leadership will see a renewed commitment to working together to implement an ethos and framework to enable all staff to recognise and shape their roles as leaders and followers in respect of the college's mission, values and strategic plan. This will be achieved through a pledge to open communications, empowering staff, high performance, developing talent and sponsoring innovation.

2.21.8 Communication processes are the foundations which underpin organisational values and cultures

Further education colleges have well documented and formal communication processes in place to share information. However, too often the college strategic values and objectives are shared once a year, and thereafter forgotten.

Communication is critical in any organisation to ensure good rapport amongst all staff and more importantly organisational changes are communicated effectively and in a timely manner. In further education colleges, the current practice of a monthly newsletter from the college Principal and an email to all staff is a common practice. However, this does not demonstrate the understanding and engagement from the staff who are receiving the communication. Many staff for example, report they do not read this information.

The literature review has also highlighted there is a tendency for individuals to listen only to the key bits that they have an interest in directly and to ignore the rest of the other information within the communication being shared.

The researcher argues that there is a need for a process within the new model proposed, for the recipients of the communication to provide feedback, which is open and honest without the fear of negative consequences. Communications should have a strong strategic narrative to engage managers and all staff and to generate employee voice within a culture of honest feedback for improvement. This will demonstrate a genuine integrity within the organisation's culture and communications. The values and ambitions stated in communications will need to be clearly reflected in day-to-day behaviours. Communications should make everyone feel a valued member of the team. They should set clear objectives and show teams how their work contributes to the organisation's objectives. Communications need to give regular, thoughtful, honest and constructive feedback on performance.

Far too often, the case study college demonstrated damaging communication strategies such as; making promises, but not keeping them, failing to give meaningful, interesting and stretching work, so staff are being developed, failing to give regular specific and constructive feedback. Managers also systematically failed to run meetings to time, or a clear set of action points at the end, so everyone knows what has been decided and who is doing what.

All Senior Managers need to discuss with their teams items related to professional and career development at regular points during the year rather than leave this to annual PDP. These managers should do more to thank their teams for their work and to recognise, celebrate and reward achievements. In addition, their skills in communicating are critical and they should be approachable and available when needed. Senior Managers should take time to get to know their team. They should be discreet and demonstrate that they can be trusted and they also need to be mindful of their teams work/life balance and act accordingly should this be an issue.

2.21.9 Curriculum middle managers far too often are not exposed to external market forces and are totally inward facing managers

The nature of curriculum middle managers post requires these individuals as stated earlier to undertake management roles of supporting teams in the implementation of policy and practice. However, if these managers are to become future senior leaders, it will be imperative for these individuals to be exposed to external market forces. In vast majority of further education colleges, these managers would not be expected to participate in any external activities.

The researcher argues that due to the nature of the role now being significantly different to the past and the dynamics of the further education college being far more commercialised. There is a clear need for these curriculum middle managers to be exposed to college partnership arrangements with employers, Government agencies, universities, schools etc. The researcher also acknowledges this may not be a significant part of the curriculum middle

manager's role or priority, however the failure to acknowledge this critical aspect of future development will potentially further hinder the role of a curriculum middle manager undertaking a senior management role.

In the new proposed model, it is suggested that curriculum middle managers work shadow senior leaders to understand the holistic operating challenges, which these managers have to navigate.

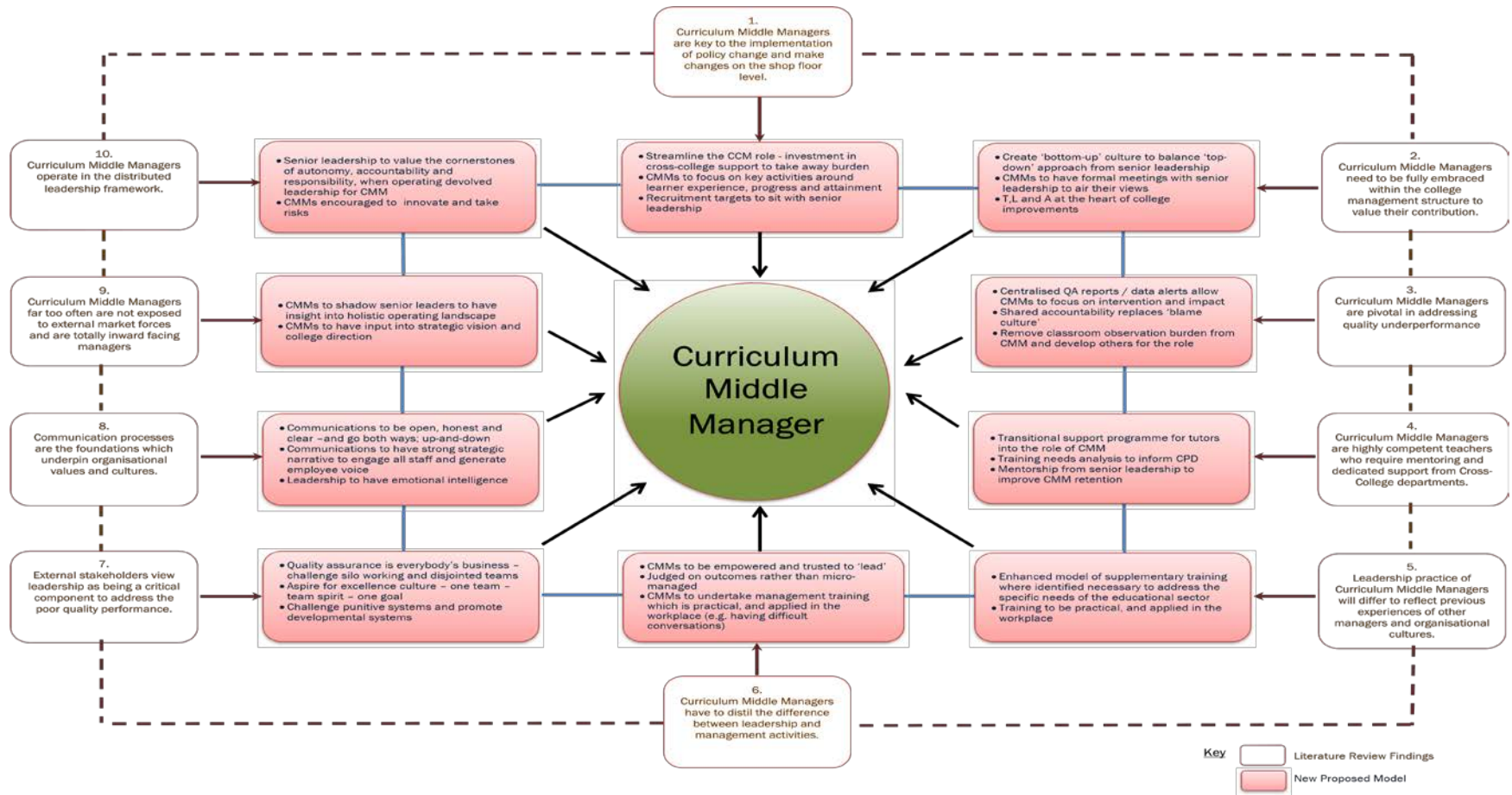
2.21.10 Curriculum middle managers operate in the distributed leadership framework

In further education colleges vast majority of curriculum middle managers operate in a distributed leadership framework. The purpose being that senior leaders devolve roles and responsibilities and autonomy to these critical curriculum middle managers to implement change and bring about high-performing curriculum teams/departments. In a theoretical model, this framework appears to provide the curriculum middle manager appropriate, relevant and a realistic model to operate within. The researcher views this model as a starting point but argues that in principle, colleges may operate this structure on paper, but in practice, the fundamental cornerstones of autonomy, accountability and responsibility are failing to prevail in light of senior management teams' failure to create a culture for the curriculum middle manager to flourish in. Furthermore, this is not in many instances where the senior management team are pre-occupied with vanity projects and failed to recognise the difficulties and challenges funding constraints have brought about on the shop floor and for curriculum middle managers to negotiate.

The new proposed model recommends that senior managers avoid paying lip service to the critical aspects of curriculum middle managers having autonomy, accountability and responsibility, by allowing these managers to deliver substantive projects in their entirety which necessitates due regard to issues beyond the curriculum for example, finance, resources etc. This would then allow the curriculum middle managers to develop and demonstrate skills to operate at a

larger scale. This then would result in a true reflection of distributed leadership. To secure senior management buy into this suggests the researcher recommends that the senior leaders provide a framework in which autonomy, accountability and responsibility can be demonstrated.

Figure 2: Proposed Model from the Literature Review for curriculum middle managers Leadership and Quality Improvement Practice



The proposed model can now be explored by applying them to a specific context of a further education college, at a specific point in time.

This study aims to extend the literature by generating further education college embedded theory, which draws upon the areas of reflective practice and critical leadership issues permeating around the curriculum middle managers' role.

The next chapter provides in-depth details surrounding the case study college-working environment of the fourteen curriculum middle managers and the challenges facing the college from a financial and quality point of view.

Chapter Three: Theory and practice of curriculum middle managers in the case study college

3.1 Further education college leadership

Over the last ten years, further education colleges are increasingly led by non-academic professionals. Financial Directors and business entrepreneurs are becoming commonplace as college leaders. This change has come about since incorporation in 1992.

Many college governing bodies who are responsible for the appointment of the college Chief Executive Officer and Principal have been following a commercial business model when appointing college leaders. This phenomenon has gathered significant pace over the last two years in light of many colleges struggling to survive as a viable business. Therefore, the focus of college leaders has tended to be financially driven whilst the quality of teaching and learning has been the responsibility of the Deputy or Vice Principals. However, Ofsted inspection teams are challenging college leaders to demonstrate clear impact of the senior leadership teams in raising standards of teaching and learning (and see the ultimate accountability of raising the aforesaid standards being firmly the responsibility of the college leader).

In addition, the college governing body is also being challenged by Ofsted inspectors to demonstrate how the governing organisation challenges and holds senior leaders accountable to raise standards of teaching and learning. This expectation has resulted in many governing bodies changing their composition to reflect an educational team of individuals with currency to challenge senior college management teams. This shift has been fuelled also by number of colleges being awarded *Requires Improvement* or *Inadequate* grades during the academic year 2014-15.

During this period, 25% of colleges inspected by Ofsted were graded in this manner. This outcome was damning for the further education sector and is compounded further by financial budget cuts. The expectation to raise standards of teaching and learning whilst removing many support management roles due to financial cutbacks seems to have been parked firmly at the curriculum middle

managers' door. Many senior managers now realise the importance of curriculum middle managers playing a pivotal role in the whole business organisation. Therefore, the curriculum middle manager's leadership role is crucial for the further education sector to raise standards of teaching and learning.

The case study college clearly demonstrated that it was operating within and being affected by an environment directly influenced by the significant factors mentioned here in terms of a national picture established over several years.

Whilst the case study college was able to acknowledge these factors and felt that it was devising effective strategies which would navigate the challenges ahead, this research provides evidence which shows a disconnect between policy and practice, and between leadership and followship, be that at senior level, or between curriculum middle managers and tutors in the classroom.

As stated earlier it can be argued that the success of a further education college largely hinges on the quality of curriculum middle managers' leadership effectiveness for both finance and curriculum measures. Within this context, a study of curriculum middle managers' leadership and their effectiveness at the college is pertinent. At the time this case study was undertaken, the college had a long history of poor financial performance, which resulted in the college receiving additional financial support from the funding agency. Student academic performance was poor, there was no tangible evidence that the college was focusing on raising standards of teaching and learning and curriculum middle managers were preoccupied with college financial difficulties. For example, curriculum middle managers were targeted to recruit students to ensure class size viability (a 'bums on seats' culture). This approach from a financial point of view on face value appears to be the right course of action. However, this approach only provides short-term gains because if students do not complete their programme of study successfully, income generated from student success is affected. For example, colleges receive 20% payment on students achieving their qualifications.

Curriculum middle managers received monthly student retention rates for their subject areas. Many curriculum middle managers would argue that these reports were inaccurate and that their own spreadsheet monitoring student retention showed performance to be improving. This further demonstrated the lack of a cross-college cohesive student progress monitoring and confirmed a fragmented college approach on reporting student performance over the course of the year.

Detailed analysis of the college's approach to student recruitment processes and performance-monitoring procedures demonstrated many weaknesses. Key weaknesses identified were as follows:

1. Student applications process – all applications received by the college were sent to subject tutors who were responsible for interviewing students and offering a place to the student on the course. Curriculum middle managers played a negligible role in this process, other than receiving a management information report from the college information department to show how many students were being offered places on courses.
2. Student interview process – for example, The Ofsted inspection of 2002 identified serious issues in the student interview process and course design: 'Uneven quality of student guidance and curriculum planning' Ofsted (2002).

The college operated a one-to-one meeting with the student and the subject tutor who was responsible for making a decision to offer a place on a course. Students were not asked to complete an initial assessment process or a practical assessment to check the suitability of the student academically or practically. This process did not ensure subject tutors adhered to entry qualification requirements. Close examination of data demonstrated that a number of students who did not successfully complete

their programme of study had not had the right entry qualification requirements in the first place, as stipulated in the college prospectus. This departure demonstrated a lack of rigour and consistency in the student interview process to ensure the right student was on the right programme with the right support. Furthermore, there were a number of students who were offered places on programmes who required specialist support. This support was not recognised at the outset and no mechanisms were identified to support these students. This resulted in curriculum middle managers having to find last-minute solutions to support the students.

3. College success rates - Overall college student achievement was best described as middle-of-the-road as stated earlier. This was largely due to many subject tutors accepting students onto programmes without the correct entry qualifications and their lack of student progress monitoring procedures. In addition, tutor attitudes lacked a desire and passion to raise expectations of students with low entry qualifications and there was a culture of acceptance that these students would fail. Curriculum middle managers failed to challenge subject programme tutors regarding low student success and performance management processes were non-existent to hold accountable underperforming tutors.
4. College communication processes – many tutors in the classroom were working relentlessly to support the senior management team to address the financial position of the college recruiting as many students as possible. The college senior management team’s approach to address poor student performance was not communicated effectively to tutors in the classroom. The senior management too often sent out mixed messages, this was evident when challenging a subject tutor on his student success. The response was “my job is to get as many students as possible; it’s all about bums on seats”. In a further instance, a tutor was delivering a Level 3 programme on a higher education semester framework. When questioned about this framework and the fact that many

students were failing to complete the programme successfully, the tutor responded by stating 'this is a level 3 programme and these students need to be prepared for the higher education sector'. This response was alarming and demonstrated a culture of a tutor driven curriculum with very limited senior management influence and measure. This culture prevailed in many other departments. Student success rates during the period of 2000–2004 showed only 70% of 16-18-year-old students successfully completing their programme of study. The Ofsted report in 2002 reported many weaknesses and graded three curriculum areas as inadequate, which resulted in the college being re-inspected.

'Unsatisfactory student attainment on full-time courses in IT, Engineering and Hospitality...low retention rates on many full-time courses' (Ofsted 2002).

The re-inspection in 2004 demonstrated the college had made satisfactory improvements in the three subject areas that had previously been graded by Ofsted as Inadequate.

5. College quality systems and processes – the college had a Quality department of one member of staff who was responsible to the Deputy Principal. The drive and leadership of the college Quality department was the responsibility of the Deputy Principal. The Quality coordinator's main role was to compile college self-assessment reports, monitor progress of the college quality improvement and have oversight of external verification visits. In addition, this member of staff also administered all questionnaires and analysed results, which were reported to senior management. From this college structure it was evident that the college's quality systems and processes primarily had oversight of a very limited area and were only satisfying fundamental requirements.

'The college's approach to self-assessment is insufficiently thorough and lacks rigour.... Curriculum areas have failed to identify significant weaknesses in teaching and learning and student achievements and action plans arising from self-

assessment reports are not well monitored in many areas of the college' (Ofsted 2002).

'There are inconsistencies in quality assurance and self-assessment and course level' (Ofsted 2006).

Furthermore, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment did not feature in the college quality department structure.

6. Teaching, learning and assessment – as stated above the quality team did not have oversight of the quality of the teaching, learning and assessment in the classroom. This was the responsibility of the college teaching and learning manager who reported to the Director of human resources. This individual's role was to have oversight of the lesson observation team, compile reports on the quality of teaching and learning and put in place cross-college staff development day activities. The lesson observation process consisted of two key features, firstly, curriculum middle managers from opposing curriculum areas observed teachers in the classroom, secondly, lesson observation reports for each subject area were produced. There was no overall report produced with key areas of strengths and weaknesses.

'There is no overall college analysis outcomes lesson observations and insufficient sharing of good practice in teaching and learning' (Ofsted 2002).

In principle, this process sounds fit for purpose, however, there was no correlation between student success and the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. Overall college reports on the quality of teaching and learning showed 85% of lessons to be outstanding or good. This did not correlate with the student success rate of 70% and this significant difference demonstrated a disconnect between activities taking place in the classroom and student outcomes.

‘The internal observation system, whilst improved, is still not sufficiently robust in identifying the qualities necessary to transform satisfactory teaching into teaching good or better. This assessment report whilst accurately identifying many of the strengths and areas of improvement, overestimated the quality of teaching’ Ofsted (2006).

‘Detailed analysis of the lesson observation reports showed that these reports were biased towards the quality of teaching taking place and reflected very little on the learning taking place. Too few lessons cater sufficiently well for the learning needs of each individual within the group’ Ofsted (2006).

Furthermore, the training received by the curriculum middle managers who conducted lesson observations in the class was a three-hour annual training session. There were no internal quality assurance measures to check the observer, provide standardisation meetings, mentoring processes for new observers, student involvement, evaluate the impact of the lesson observation process to raise standards of teaching and learning, involvement of external experts to benchmark college lesson observation processes and results. The college also failed to share best practice from teachers graded as outstanding or good.

‘Embed arrangements to increase the rigour of internal lesson observations by enabling observers to assess learning and progress in lessons more effectively and ensuring observation records are evaluative and accurately graded. Ensure that appraisal is take systematic account of the outcomes from lesson observations and of targets set at earlier appraisals’ Ofsted (2010).

This once again reflected a college process of compliance to demonstrate that the college had a quality process measure teaching, learning and assessment. The significant weakness of this process was that staff who were graded ‘inadequate’ or ‘requires improvement’ did not receive any formal support or mentoring and the college human resources department failed to address staff underperformance. Therefore, many teaching staff viewed the lesson observation process as an annual event with little value. Curriculum middle managers did not receive lesson observation reports

for their staff; however, they were made aware of the outcome of lesson observation. Areas identified by the observer as weaknesses in lesson observation processes were not followed up to support staff and there was no link to the members of staff annual appraisal report. Ofsted's recommendation was to:

‘Secure greater consistency in the quality of provision between curriculum areas through more effective sharing of good practice’
Ofsted (2010).

7. Senior leadership and management - the college senior management team primarily concentrated on improving the college financial position. This involved the Principal, Deputy Principal and the Financial Director spending a considerable time working with external agencies to devise and implement a recovery plan. However, the rest of the senior management team (including heads of department who were responsible for the management of middle managers) did not put into place a coherent curriculum quality improvement plan to raise standards of teaching and learning to improve student outcomes. Furthermore, senior managers failed to support curriculum middle managers and teachers in the classroom by their inability to implement support mechanisms and methodologies of sharing best practice.

The failure to recognise that the Quality department not overseeing the college lesson observation process was a fundamental barrier to improve student success rates and is an unacceptable position. In addition, there was a lack of investment in staff development support to reflect individual staff member's needs. The model operated by the college quality and human resource departments lacked rigour and there was no oversight by one individual of the senior management team to provide leadership and management.

‘Promote teachers’ skills in using strategies that challenge and stretch learners, including increased use of more demanding

questions, greater emphasis on matching tasks to individual ability and making sure that learners think for themselves, so that more learners make consistently good progress relative to their respective starting points' Ofsted (2010).

3.1.1 Summary

From the above, it is clear that a culture of sector compliance and a lacklustre approach was taken by the college senior management team and curriculum middle managers to raise standards of teaching, learning and assessment to improve the quality of teaching and learning to improve student success rates.

The financial position of the college was no doubt a major distraction during the period 2002-06. However, it is difficult to understand the lack of focus and actions to address the inconsistency in teaching and learning and the lack of improvement, the degree of inconsistency in success rate performance and the quality of provision between different curriculum areas. Curriculum middle managers were responsible for their departments' financial and quality performance; however, these managers were not held accountable by the senior management team.

The researcher's role as the Deputy Principal for Curriculum and Quality at the case study college has to be also challenged regarding the impact of this individual to raise standards of teaching and learning. The Deputy Principal's role encompasses accountability for academic results and line management responsibility to support curriculum middle managers in their role in the day to operations. This case study seeks to transcend this potential conflict of interests and thus critically appraise all pertinent factors relevant to the effectiveness of the leadership practice of curriculum middle managers.

It is only relatively recently that important improvements have been achieved, with the award of a 'Good' Ofsted report in May 2010 and marked amelioration in financial performance. However, the pockets of inconsistencies remained.

college stakeholders will expect further improvements, and this required effective leadership.

This study focuses on the leadership function of curriculum middle managers. There are several reasons for this focus. First, there had been a reduction in the senior team from eight to six members through the loss of two senior academic managers in light of financial constraints following a reduction in college budgets. This required further devolution of responsibilities to middle managers. Secondly, Ofsted's perception was that leadership and management were more effective at senior than middle management level. Thirdly, there is a growing interest in the role of curriculum middle managers' leadership in the field of further education.

Further education is little researched (Hughes et al. 1996; Lumby 2001) and management in further education still less. There are therefore fewer empirically based studies than in the school sector for college researchers and managers to consider. The diversity of the sector may at times limit colleges from imitating each other's systems, yet an understanding of the issues which underlie, delimit and frame the diversity of management practice is valuable (Briggs 2002).

3.2 Middle managers' role (curriculum)

For the purpose of this study, a curriculum middle manager is an individual who reports to a Level 2 senior manager such as a Deputy Principal and manages a medium-size cohort of ten to fourteen teachers. It is well documented that curriculum middle managers are implementers of policy and practice. Briggs (2002 p34) identified four dimensions to the work of academic middle managers.

Firstly, a 'bridging and brokering role, where policies and perspectives of senior staff are translated by the middle manager into departmental practice'. Secondly, there is a 'transformational dimension' - this is where the middle manager motivates staff to be creative in departmental activities. Thirdly, the middle

manager uses his or her expertise to raise staff and student performance - that aspect could be described as 'supervisory leadership'.

Finally, middle managers have a liaison role to communicate with internal and external stakeholders to maintain departmental networks; Briggs (2002) described this as a dimension of a 'representative leadership'.

Bennett (1995) states that the term middle management assumes a hierarchical structure where the middle manager decodes the strategic message from senior managers into practical outcomes. Therefore, this structure assumes a downward flow of authority to achieve what the leader seeks. The key question in such a structure is: 'are middle managers participating in shared decision-making?' Briggs (2000) and Earley (1998) argue that middle managers are too often concerned with curriculum priorities and that strategy is unlikely to be a central role of their duties. However, from a personal point of view it could be argued that contribution of middle managers to shared decision-making is a critical process within the further education sector.

This is largely due to the senior management understanding that feedback from the 'chalk face' is imperative to evaluate strategies and processes having a positive or negative impact. This feedback is critical to demonstrate that creative ideas from middle managers and ground staff are just as important to address underperformance or raise standards. Furthermore, this demonstrates staff buy-in at all levels within the organisation is important and that middle managers can influence and shape strategy.

The management structure in many colleges allows curriculum middle managers to have power and autonomy to work effectively to articulate the vision to ensure the business of the college operates successfully. For example, many curriculum middle managers are asked to shape curriculum portfolios in order to have currency in the world of work.

Such power and autonomy is monitored by senior managers to ensure key performance indicators for the organisation are being met and to ensure the middle manager is accountable for his or her actions. For example, curriculum middle managers are largely judged by the student outcomes and quality of teaching and learning. These two critical components are embraced within the job specifications and description of such middle managers. The curriculum middle manager's role further demands the ability to interact with other cross-college departments for example finance, estates and student services to improve the learning environment and experience of students. This is best described by Briggs (2002), who states:

'There is thus potentially role ambiguity between the specialist in any given management area, and others whose specialist function intersects with their role. Management consists of a mass of fragmented and disjointed activities, constant interruption, or pressure for immediate answers to questions and solutions to problems' – may result in the expertise of specialists not being fully used' (Briggs 2002 p67).

Briggs (2002) argues that too often, the primary function of the college is teaching and learning and responsibility for the product may be seen as overtaking precedence over responsibility for the process. The researcher would support Briggs' argument that all too often; a significant amount of curriculum middle managers' time is spent on the process and not on the 'shop-floor' business of teaching and learning. For example, curriculum middle managers in many colleges are now responsible for curriculum planning.

This would be seen as a relevant and appropriate priority, however, there is very little consideration given to improve teaching and learning. Furthermore, the researcher has witnessed many curriculum middle managers being overwhelmed with administrative duties such as setting up open days, meeting employers and attending cross-college meetings regarding Student Services. All these duties are important, however, there is little evidence to support the argument that teaching and learning is at the heart of the curriculum middle managers' role. It is only when student outcomes are poor that closer attention to such failure is paid.

There is a clear responsibility for senior managers and colleges to recognise and offer support for curriculum middle managers in continuous improvement and share best practice. In 2000, the further education sector was tasked to establish Centres of Vocational Excellence (COVEs) for specific subject areas.

This was a government initiative to address underperformance by allowing college staff to network and share best practice. The COVE colleges were given significant financial incentives to post and run a series of network workshops at which curriculum middle managers would share best practice and develop teaching and learning materials to enhance the student experience. However, this initiative was not a mandatory requirement for all colleges to participate in (and also when the funding ceased these centres no longer were the government flagships for sharing best practice). Therefore, the need to create a non-threatening environment for a set of local colleges to work together to address underperformance and best practice is critical, especially in light of both extreme financial constraints being placed on colleges and the relentless need to drive up performance.

Curriculum middle managers have a wealth of specialist knowledge and experiences from the shop floor. The need to embrace and harness these qualities is very important in order to influence strategic changes. Curriculum middle managers are change makers or in some quarters deemed policy implementers. Too often, these managers are seen as problem solvers and very little opportunity is made available or given to these staff to actually discuss their educational values or experiences. From this, it is clear that there is a need for senior managers to create a platform or a culture to discuss and hold dialogue with curriculum middle managers when establishing educational values or reshaping the college's strategic landscape.

The role of the curriculum middle manager has many facets. Many of these managers are highly competent teachers. However, performance managing

teaching staff, developing departmental business plans and contributing to strategic cross-college matters, can be problematic and challenging. The need for a dedicated professional development programme to support these managers to develop a skill set is critical. In addition, the need to expose these managers to challenges in the real world of work is very important. This is critical to allow managers to put into practice their leadership learning, further develop their experience and enhance their skill-set. Furthermore, senior managers need to create a college culture, which is a learning community throughout the whole organisation.

Many colleges have successfully been accredited with the award Investors in People. This accreditation reflects an organisational approach at all levels of the organisation to develop all staff. However, during Ofsted inspection processes no mention of this accreditation is made or reflected on whether Ofsted inspectors are making judgements on teaching and learning.

The further education sector over the last six years has experienced significant and landscaping changes. Even as an experienced senior manager, the researcher finds the volume of these changes and the need to rapidly digest and implement policy into practice extremely challenging. This rate of change often results in curriculum middle managers not being consulted to contribute to or influence practice. Therefore, it is imperative to create a consultative environment within which curriculum middle managers are able to embrace government policies in order to shape practice. This creates a single college approach, which promotes a culture of collaboration in which tasks and responsibilities are shared and leadership distributed.

These findings are also relevant to middle managers who work in schools. Gold (1998 p45) describes the school middle managers as 'at the forefront of knowledge about specific subject, but these leaders are not usually part of a school's leadership or management team and mostly they do not have overall responsibility. However, they hold significant management and leadership roles

in schools where they are often the key influence of the quality of learning and teaching'. The role of school middle managers is critical in raising the standards of teaching and learning because they are implementing strategic leadership change and government policies to address underperformance. However, too often many of these middle managers lack experience and skill sets to manage staff and implement change.

Closer comparison of the role of curriculum middle managers in further education and school academic middle managers reveals that many similar duties have to be performed, for example leading a team of teachers to implement curriculum change, improve student performance, address underperformance in the classroom etc. Therefore, one could argue that there is a clear link between the further education sector and the curriculum middle manager's role in a school.

3.2.1 Summary

The examination of curriculum middle managers' role in the further education sector highlights the need for:

1. Staff in these critical academic roles to influence the values of education and help inform the leadership activities of the college. This is critical to ensure a purposeful, inclusive and values-driven leadership.
2. Senior managers to create a culture of inclusivity regardless of role or level, for the college to ensure curriculum middle managers can forge meaningful dialogue with colleagues in other colleges to share best practice.
3. Harnessing the curriculum middle manager's expertise in student learning within their area of responsibility needs to be maintained and constantly updated.

However, there is a need for a dedicated programme to support these managers to develop strategies and skills to:

- Articulate strategic college values.
- Negotiate with senior staff to secure resources and structures to raise standards of teaching and learning within their own areas.
- Monitor staff performance.
- Hold difficult conversations with colleagues.
- Develop trust, sensitivity and openness.

These are critical tools for transforming teaching and learning. In addition, developing skills to operate strategically (thinking and planning), and to effectively implement strategies for managing change, will require careful consideration and implementation.

1. Curriculum middle managers need to have autonomy to distribute leadership to subject tutors to create a college culture in which all staff see the function of leadership in every aspect of teaching and learning. This promotes a culture of collaboration in which tasks and responsibilities are shared and all staff have opportunities to influence and shape future changes.
2. Senior managers need to build capacity by developing the college as a learning community. Curriculum middle managers working collaboratively to address student underperformance and implementing change require a culture in which learning is at the heart of the organisation's strategic improvement plan. This paves the way for curriculum middle managers to promote staff development reflecting their department's need more closely.
3. Curriculum middle managers need to develop through experiential and innovative methodologies. These staff need to be exposed to a wide range of leadership styles and skills to enable them to find ways of making those styles and skills fit the challenges facing them in work.
4. Curriculum middle manager's role is predominantly internal facing and the opportunity to influence the broader educational debate is very rare.

Therefore, they need to understand the wider policy context of the college and government educational policies. There is a need for a coherent, systematic implementation process, which allows all staff to discuss and understand why they are being asked to complete certain professional activities and why requests are made for specific information.

The next chapter provides details of the methodology and methods deployed in this case study. The chapter initially outlines the philosophical position of the researcher and provides the justification for interpretive research and a case study for this study. In addition, clarification is made regarding the role of an *insider researcher* in order to ensure validity and reliability of findings and data collection strategies; data analysis and the limitations of the study.

Chapter Four: Research methodology and methods

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides details of the interpretive hermeneutic / constructivist research methodology and the related qualitative methods deployed for this case study. Firstly, the researcher will set out and clarify the definitions to be utilised. The chapter then explores through further reflexivity, the context and rationale of the study, aspects of participant researcher - insider research and the challenges thereof. The researcher's own philosophical position is examined alongside research ethics. Strengths and limitations of the case study approach are abridged within the chapter summary.

Details of the responsibilities of participants who took part in the research and their roles are provided. Research findings allow the development of a theory of effective leadership emerging from the participants' data (which can be compared with those suggested in the literature). Issues concerning ethics, validity, and reliability are also reflected upon in this chapter.

In this case study, the researcher being the insider brings previous experience to the fore as a curriculum middle manager for six years as well as a background knowledge of the contemporary challenges current curriculum middle managers face during the austerity measures within the further education sector and in particular the case study college, are having to embrace and navigate.

The researcher benefited in having an in-depth understanding of the critical issues related to the curriculum middle managers leadership practice, whilst acknowledging that assumptions and preconceptions should not overly shape the outcomes from the case study. The experience of being able to work at three different further education colleges supported the researcher's breadth of understanding regarding the challenges at play for all practitioners promoted from outstanding tutor to college middle manager working across several teams and answering to those above and below. As an ex-insider, it was necessary for the researcher to ensure honest and open dialog with case study college participants,

as Crossely and Watson (2003 p36) state, the researcher needs to be aware of influence of past baggage.

During the semi-structured interviews conducted during this case study, the researcher outlined the key objectives of the research and acknowledged the critical value placed on the role of curriculum middle manager. The researcher explained that it was clear how the role of the curriculum middle manager's integrity and drive directly ensured that students would often receive the best possible teaching and learning experience to enable them to achieve and progress onto further studies and into employment. Furthermore, the participants appreciated and valued the insight afforded by the fact that the researcher had been a former classroom teacher and curriculum manager.

Setting the scene in this way had a positive effect in settling each participant and creating a good rapport, which enabled curriculum middle managers the voice they felt needed to be heard.

4.2 Definitions

4.2.1 College academic middle managers

For the purposes of this study the term curriculum 'middle managers' will be defined as first tier academic managers within the further education (FE) sector i.e. curriculum middle managers. These managers' report to senior managers and also manage groups of staff themselves (this may include full-time and part-time teachers and support staff). The composition of staff group to manage typically consists of eight full-time and ten part-time teaching staff.

4.2.2 Effective leadership

For this case study, the performance criteria framework for effective leadership (as set out in the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework handbook of 2015) will be utilised. The criteria for effective leadership in the framework not only satisfies Ofsted regarding the quality of leadership they find in colleges, they are also for

the most part validated by international research evidence about educational leadership (see for example, Robinson *et al.* 2007).

4.2.3 Research aims and questions

The aim of this research stems from personal professional experience, in that the curriculum middle manager role is critical in the implementation of policy and practice in the learning environment. For example, Ofsted inspection reports (2014) for colleges graded as *'Requires Improvement'* or *'Inadequate'* in many cases report that managers over-generalise their understanding of quality practice and are too often ineffective in addressing poor performance.

The aim of this study is to examine the degree to which the relationship between curriculum middle managers' leadership practice and quality improvement are shaping both the demands made on curriculum middle managers and how this might affect their actual practice. This study will investigate the leadership practice and quality improvements of middle managers in one FE college. The more specific objectives of the study are to:

- Clarify the role of curriculum middle managers and practice in a college setting and the implications for effective academic leadership.
- Capture curriculum middle managers' perceptions of leadership through semi-structured interviews, and reflective practice.

These objectives address a general lack of clarity and understanding regarding curriculum middle managers' practice, and so strive to expand the level of knowledge available in this area.

In attempting to understand the leadership role of middle managers in securing improvement within the FE sector, this study will also provide an analysis of the experiences of middle managers in a particular context and what it is to establish an institutional leadership style and practice. The contextual basis for this study

are government policies for quality improvement in the FE sector, at a time when college budgets are being cut to reflect the current national economic climate. For example, the FE sector has experienced a 25% financial budget reduction over the last five years. The academic literature provides the underpinning knowledge and debate around leadership and management styles in bringing about change and improvements within the FE sector.

The study attempts to provide evidence about the leadership of middle managers in securing improvements. Its originality is secured through the focus on the case study college, and the operation of its leadership at this pivotal point in the FE sector's history. The results of the study will contribute to the identification of appropriate and effective leadership practice, and will help to inform senior managers and policymakers concerned with building and maintaining effective colleges.

In summary, this study provides an original insight into middle managers' leadership practice, using new observations utilising unique research findings to support or challenge current contemporary debate in the theoretical literature on the leadership role of middle managers securing quality improvement in FE.

The overarching question this study aims to address is:

What is the relationship between curriculum middle managers' leadership practice and quality improvement?

4.3 Philosophical position

The researcher currently maintains the post of Deputy Principal within a further education college. Personal experience has led to a deep interest in the journey of college curriculum middle managers and a belief that the role of Deputy Principal is to inspire curriculum middle managers to develop their skills and not lose focus on their prime role in a sector, which is constantly changing. That focus should be:

- The quality of teaching and learning.
- Impact on student outcomes.
- Developing effective teams.

From both an academic and personal position, there is an interest in their experiences and how they communicate challenges to their teams in terms of raising standards of quality.

Whilst conducting this research, it has also been necessary to reflect on personal experiences (which includes being both a curriculum middle manager and a Deputy Principal), as a way of understanding the changing landscape of the FE sector, at a time when there is an increasing onus on college leadership and management to raise standards, improve learner outcomes, and be held accountable by Ofsted and college boards of governors.

Colleges currently have to operate in a business model with financial constraints (more for less) while at the same time ensuring that learners are successfully completing their programmes and gaining employment or moving into higher levels of education or training. Therefore, as a senior leader of a college, the researcher can struggle to hold onto humanist values within an education system that measures attendance, achievement, retention and success, and conceives the learner as being a consumer (Elliott 1999). The government's focus on modelling FE colleges as a business appears unrelenting. Furthermore, the government views learner outputs (knowledge and skills) as a commodity to meet the needs of the economy.

From a personal perspective, there is difficulty in embracing the government ideology that learner output needs to *directly* have an impact on the economy - due to the fact that there is a wider purpose to education (in terms of social benefit) - education is not only about making money. However, there is

agreement with the government's agenda of greater accountability within a more flexible delivery model (which enables colleges to shape their strategic values to meet the needs of local communities). With this in mind, it is clear that research must not be influenced by personal ideological perspectives and political tensions.

As previously mentioned there is very little research around curriculum middle managers' impact on raising standards as a direct result of their approaches to leadership and management. Too often, the studies undertaken to date appear to be generic, concentrating on the general role of a middle manager. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to add to our understanding in a real world context of the relationship between middle managers' leadership practice and quality improvement in FE.

When carrying out real world research involving people it is imperative that the researcher clearly establishes their philosophical position. Robson (2004) argues that the researcher has to establish at the outset the stance taken as to how knowledge can be acquired and communicated. Taking this on board, provided below is a brief overview of the subjective and objective approaches taken into consideration when planning this case study.

The epistemology underpinning positivist approaches supports the traditional scientific methodology of research. According to Robson (2004), the research assumes that:

- Objective knowledge (facts) can only be gained from direct experience.
- Objective knowledge is the only knowledge available to science.
- Facts are separated from values.
- Datasets are derived from the use of questionnaires with strict rules and procedures.
- The researcher sets aside their own values and feelings.

In comparison, a constructivist approach considers:

- The task of the researcher to be to make sense of the multiple social constructions of meaning.
- On the whole, knowledge is subjective.
- The use of research methods such as interviews and observation allows the researcher to access these multiple perspectives.
- Participants contribute to the construction of 'reality' with the researcher (Robson 2004).

This anti-positivist approach accepts that knowledge is hidden within the complex world of the lived experience and also acknowledges that the researcher's values and feelings are connected to the research question. Examining a subjective (constructivist) approach primarily relies on experience and insight of individuals with the subject matter. This approach regards reality as being individual and socially derived, which can be subject to consensus. The role of the researcher is generally regarded as a participant who seeks to give opinions to the experiences and perceptions of participants. For this type of approach individual dialogue and semi-structured interviews is seen to be appropriate to achieving authentic reflections of participants' subjective reality. (Costley, Elliott and Gibbs 2012 p84).

4.4 Case study context and rationale

In order to investigate middle leadership in the FE sector, the researcher decided to focus on a case study, rather than a large-scale research design, due to a personal interest in the living experience of managers in a given context. This case study will allow the development of a depth of understanding and also the analysis of individuals' actions and understanding of leadership (and its role in securing quality improvements).

In this case study, a constructivist approach has been adopted. The reason for this decision is due to the fact that curriculum middle managers in colleges have a pivotal role as policy implementers. The researcher's position is that knowledge is subjective and influenced by lived experiences; this is a powerful source of information to inform and enable change. Understanding the lived experience and perception of practitioners in relation to leadership practice and quality improvement in FE is key to this enquiry. It is also important to acknowledge that knowledge is subjective and influenced by participants' life experiences, and therefore the information gathered must be the individual's version of reality to shape the outcome.

The aim in conducting this case study was to inform what is the relationship between curriculum middle managers' leadership practice and quality improvement?

The researcher agrees with McKenzie's assertion that the history of published research into educational management appears to be one where academics have reached different as well as similar conclusions about the same or very similar phenomena. Therefore, it is imperative that curriculum middle managers' experiences do not become enmeshed in what McKenzie (1997) calls, '*a churning vortex of constructive and destructive tensions in which old educational certainties are replaced by new certainties*'. Therefore, it will be imperative that these research findings can demonstrate tangible outcomes in a given context to avoid becoming yet another casualty in the eyes of McKenzie.

The researcher's identity as a practising Deputy Principal (with the remit of accountability and quality improvement) extends to personal characteristics as a researcher and, as Guba and Lincoln (1998) argue:

'In qualitative research findings are created by the interaction of Inquirer and phenomenon, rather than the Inquirer standing behind a one-way mirror and viewing and recording phenomena objectivity' (p200).

Denscombe argues that 'research is always going to be influenced by the values and expectations of those undertaking the research' (Denscombe 2010 p122). It is therefore important to acknowledge the risk that one's own life experience may also affect the research (along with the 'power differential' between the researcher/Deputy Principal and research subjects) and that participants themselves may also affect analysis of results. Of major consideration are ethical issues arising from the project process.

On the other hand, in order that the study should provide more than anecdotal evidence about effective leadership, the analysis will be grounded in the empirical evidence about effective leadership and quality in education as set out in chapter two.

A key issue when taking a case study approach is definitional. Crossley and Vulliamy (1984), for example, suggest that a case study is an ambiguous one because it means different things to different writers. Robson, on the other hand, attempts a general definition of the case study as 'a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence' (2002 p178).

A case study implies the study of, for example, a single organisation, group of individuals, or process, with the intention of gaining in-depth knowledge (Collis & Hussey 2003). Case studies are often associated with exploratory research, but Scapens (1990) allows for both descriptive and explanatory case studies. Yin (2002) notes that a case study enables the researcher to explore certain phenomena and understand them within a particular context. 'It can be a very worthwhile way of exploring existing theory' and can also enable the challenging of existing theory (Saunders et al. 2003 p93). Bell (1993) finds case studies particularly useful for studying a subject in depth within a limited time scale.

A case study research strategy is ideally suited to this study for several reasons. First, the case under study, or unit of analysis, is the practice and effectiveness of leadership within a very specific context, a group of fourteen curriculum middle managers who work for a single college at a fixed point in time. Secondly, the case is being explored within a framework of existing leadership theory, which may be open to challenge. Thirdly, the researcher wished to study leadership depth within a limited timeframe.

A case study is a precise instance that is often planned to demonstrate a broader principle (Nisbet and Wise 1984 p72), 'it is the study of an instance in action' (Adelman et al. 1984). Case studies can infiltrate situations in behaviour that are not always susceptible to statistical analysis. Furthermore, Robson (2002) comments that case studies opt for an investigative approach to provide a theoretical base to understand similar cases or phenomena.

Case studies can contribute to our understanding of cause and effect; one of their key strengths is that they examine effects in authentic contexts, recognising that context is an influential determinant of both causes *and* effects (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2010 p253). Furthermore, case studies are complex in nature, in light of human interaction and external factors providing a unique instance.

Hitchcock and Hughes (1995 p317) suggest that a case study has several distinguishing features. These being that it:

- Is immersed in rich and unique circumstances of issues relevant to the case establishes a sequential narrative of proceedings relevant to the case.
- Embeds an account of events with the critical assessment.
- Concentrates on individuals or groups of individuals and to understand their perceptions of issues.
- Highlights explicit issues that are relevant to the case.

- Involves the researcher as an integral element of the study.

Case studies endeavour to describe ‘what it is like’ to be in a particular situation, to catch the close up reality and ‘thick description’ (Greertz 1973) of participants’ lived experiences, giving voice to their thoughts about and feelings about a situation. Furthermore, they involve looking at a case or phenomenon in its real life context, usually employing many types of data (Robson 2002).

Nisbet and Watt (1984) recommend that to ensure a case study has rigour, the researcher must avoid:

- Journalism – highlighting only striking features and distorting the full account.
- Selective reporting – providing evidence to support a particular finding and misrepresenting the whole case.
- An anecdotal style – low-level tedious illustrations that over compensate for detailed analysis.
- Pomposity – producing profound theories from low-level data.
- Blandness – unthinkingly accepting participants’ views to support a particular argument and ignoring the counter argument.

It is clear from the comments above that one can very easily fall into a selective mode and over-generalise a case study investigation. Therefore, it was imperative for the researcher to clarify any assumptions.

Simons (1996) argues that case studies must avoid generalisation by addressing the following paradoxes:

1. Identify the contribution that a genuine creative encounter can make to new forms of understanding education.
2. Regard different ways of seeing as new ways of knowing.

3. Free the mind of traditional analysis.

Table 3: Types of case study adapted from Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2010)

Type of Case Study	Outcome	Author
Exploratory Descriptive Explanatory	Research questions Sequence of events Examining theories	Yin, R.K. (2002) Case Study Research: Design and Methods
Interpretive Evaluative	Developing initial assumptions Amplification and judgments	Merrin, S.B. (1988) Case Study Research in Education
Intrinsic Instrumental Collective	Developing a particular understanding Gaining an insight to an issue Establishing a fuller understanding	Stake, R.E. (1995) The Art of Case Study Research

From the above table it is apparent that case studies are unique and serve an individual setting. This is supported by Robson (2002) who argues that:

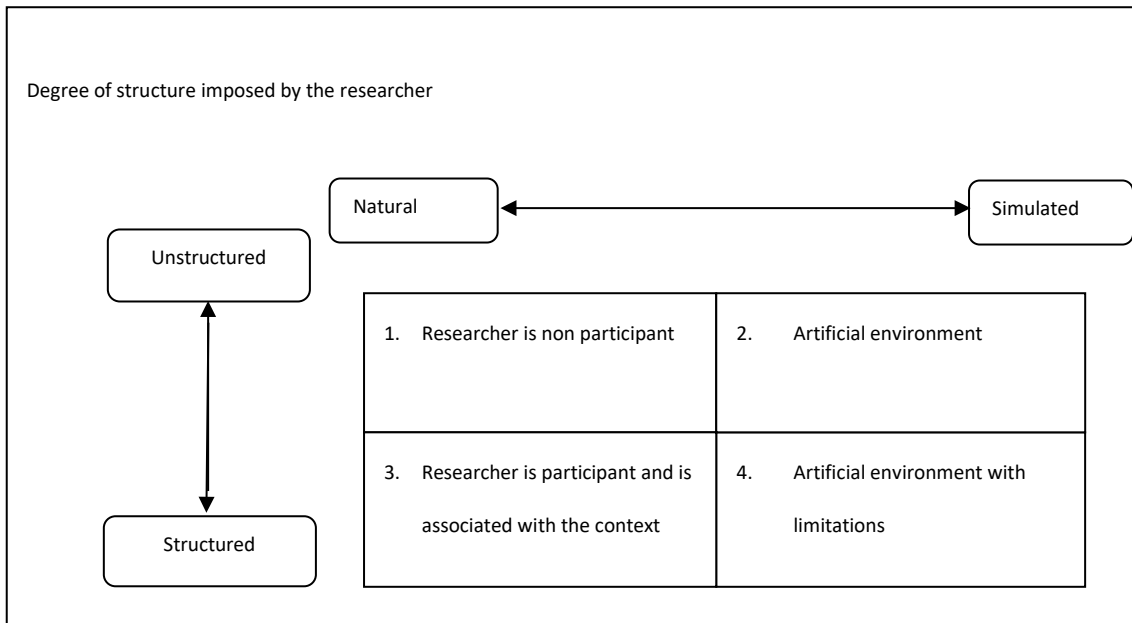
‘When your theoretical understanding is such that there is a clear, unambiguous set of circumstances where predicted outcomes will be found. Finding a case which fits, and demonstrating what has been predicted, can give a powerful boost to knowledge and understanding’ (p89).

Case studies provide a rich source of data that has validity, authenticity, currency, and sufficiency. However, one must not discard the critics. Shaughnessy et al. (2003) argue that case studies lack control, are biased because the researcher is participant and observer, and can overstate the case. Smith (1991) argues that case study methodology is weak and studying individual cases is a thing of the past. Furthermore, Dyer (1995) suggests that case studies are weak because the researcher only knows what is in or out and on what criteria.

In light of this, it is imperative that the researcher address these possible weaknesses. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2010) argue that a case study must

demonstrate reliability and validity to gain respectability and legitimacy amongst academics. The researcher has outlined later in this chapter the methodologies deployed to address these key challenges.

Table 4: Typology of case studies adapted from Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2010)



Many case studies fall into one of the cells. This research follows cell three structure (*Researcher is participant and is associated with the context*) for the current study. However, it should be noted that any given case study may also contain minor elements of the other three cells. The rationale for classifying this research in cell three is due to the fact that the researcher is a participant and the study is associated within the context of theory and practice in a given situation.

The research methodology deployed in this study was not pre-set from the beginning, but was open, formed and developed gradually, as a result of the researcher's understanding of, and engagement with the research problem. The approach to data collection was designed to draw from curriculum middle managers as full an account as possible of all aspects of their lived experience in

a leadership role in order to bind the discussions to a particular, preconceived agenda. It was only in the analysis that focus was shifted to key areas of leadership and quality identified in the literature as being important. This enabled the researcher to draw not only on practice as it became apparent, but also the inherent contribution of participants.

This approach aligns with the view of Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2010 p78) who argue that there is no single template for planning research. However, the research is governed by the notion of 'fitness for purpose' – different research paradigms for different research purposes. This is particularly true for a case study approach which by definition, is rooted in a very dynamic context of evolving practice.

Basing the research on this sort of flexible design is not to suggest neglect regarding the importance of rigour in data collection and analysis. The design described below seeks to avoid the criticism and questionable findings Denscombe (2010 p1) warns against if the writer fails to pay attention to elementary factors that govern good research.

Denscombe (2008) suggests that case study research is vehemently 'contested' amongst experts, with the consequence that it is difficult to establish clear guidelines. This is due largely to the wide range of subject areas, which are the focus of case study research, such as education, health, social work and media studies. For this reason, the case study does not belong to any single paradigm, but serves research purposes in a variety of research fields, such as sociology, psychology, economics and politics.

The researcher in this case study has significant experience as an insider from the position of past experience of having undertaken the role of curriculum middle manager at several colleges. Now the researcher is a senior manager and is an outsider to the curriculum middle manager's role all be it an insider to the college. This change of roles is highlighted by Crossley and Wickins (2016) who argue:

‘In the modern world our identities and roles are so fluid, the old way of talking that you are an insider and outsider in most cases does not capture the true sense of our roles in the 21st century. We are a bit of an insider and a bit of an outsider and this changes with time’ (p236).

The researcher in this case study has over twenty-five years of experience of the further education sector from working at different further education colleges. This experience has been gained through the lens of a part-time lecturer, full-time lecturer, curriculum middle manager, Head of Department, Assistant Principal and the current position of Deputy Principal. This unique position enables the researcher to position his approach from a constructivist concept.

4.4.1 Documentation analysis

In this case, study the researcher analysed the last three set of Ofsted inspection reports, college policies relating to quality improvement, staff development processes, college self-assessment reports, quality improvement plans, lesson observation processes, lesson observation analysis, student success rates for the last six years and college management team meeting minutes. This analysis provided the researcher with rich data reflecting current practice within the case study college and measurable outcomes, which support the findings and recommendations in chapter seven.

4.4.2 A management perspective

For this case study, the researcher as insider provided an opportunity to gather live data from naturally occurring situations. For example, curriculum middle managers attend three annual Quality Summit meetings at which they demonstrate their team’s performance to date and actions being considered or taken to address underperformance. These meetings are structured and curriculum middle managers have a clear agenda given to them prior to the meeting to ensure appropriate preparation has taken place. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011 p397-399) describe this type of observation being highly structured in a formal setting. This observation opportunity provides first hand live

data reflecting the curriculum middle managers' leadership skills in raising standards of teaching and learning and student outcomes. As stated earlier in this chapter, it is important to be mindful that in being the senior line manager, curriculum middle managers do not simply present information, which is perceived to satisfy one's own expectations. The validity and authenticity of this observation is safeguarded due to the presence of the Director of Learning and Quality being present at the quality summit meeting and the data reflecting student performance being presented by the college head of student information services. This enables triangulation of the methodology and content of the curriculum middle managers' presentation, actual student performance and the independent lesson observation report presented at the meeting by the Director of Learning and Quality.

Observations of this kind (Morrison 1993 p80) enable the researcher to gather data on:

- Physical environment and its organisation.
- The characteristics and make-up of the group or individuals being observed for a given instance.
- The interaction that is taking place.
- The resources and the organisation.

Patton (1990) argues that this type of observation enables the researcher to enter and understand the situation that is being examined. However, Bailey (1994) reminds the academic world that the lack of controlling and observing in natural settings can render observation less useful when coupled with problems in measurement and difficulties in maintaining anonymity. These risks need to be considered very carefully. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) suggest that a structured observation needs to be planned, adequate time needs to be made available and analysis of the data needs to have clear criteria.

In addition to the curriculum middle managers attending quality summit meetings, the college self-assessment report is formulated by curriculum middle managers annually, writing their self-assessment reports for each of their subject areas. This activity also provides the researcher with an understanding of the distance travelled, the challenges ahead and how realistic the approach being taken is to address underperformance. Once again, it is important that this observation is validated to ensure the process is authentic. This is achieved by the engagement of a practising Ofsted inspector who attends an annual meeting to validate, comment on the quality of the self-assessment report, and benchmark the performance of the subject area.

The curriculum middle managers are also responsible for conducting appraisals of all their staff and ensuring appropriate staff development activities are attended by their staff. This also provides data regarding the level of engagement in a broader sense (in managing staff to raise standards and share best practice). Teachers who are graded by the internal observation process as '*Requiring Improvement*' or '*Inadequate*' are required to be closely line managed by the curriculum middle manager to provide support and monitor progress in line with the college performance management policies. The college Director of Learning and Quality, Director of Human Resources and Head of Department meet fortnightly to review the performance of teachers identified to be underperforming. This whole process provides live data, which demonstrates the impact of curriculum middle managers in the classroom.

Student surveys regarding induction and teaching and learning are also an additional source of information reflecting action points for curriculum middle managers to address areas of improvement requested by students. It is the role of curriculum middle managers to analyse and engage with students to address areas identified in their curriculum subject area requiring improvements. This process is monitored independently by the quality department to ensure improvements are secured. Once again, this activity enables analysis of the impact of curriculum middle managers.

The key document pertaining to all the above is the job description of curriculum middle managers. The job description for this cohort of managers unequivocally states there is a requirement for curriculum leadership to ensure curriculum is fit for purpose and raise standards of teaching and learning to be 'Good' or 'Outstanding'. This document provides the researcher with a further analytical tool when observing or analysing the performance of the curriculum middle manager (and establishes benchmark data to evaluate the impact of that manager).

In summary, the opportunities for the researcher as insider offered access to observable material for gaining an insight into situations. However, the research must satisfy what Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011 p412) call '*issues of validity and reliability*'. For this case study, the observation tool is fit for purpose in light of the validity and reliability of the data being achieved through triangulation by independent processes. However, the need to address the risk of bias is imperative (Wilkinson 2000, Moyles 2002, Robson 2002, Shaughnessy *et al.* 2003). For example, what are our own interests, participants changing their behaviour in a way they think the research wishes, observers' behaviour and conduct, selective data entry and misinterpretation.

With its emphasis on human experience and how practitioners both thought and felt regarding their role and the variables that impact upon it, the case study required some form of structured approach in order to make sense of potentially a wide range of different data types and responses. Whilst the researcher wanted some commonality in the data gathered in order for comparison, it was important to also allow for some deviation of response and enable scope away from overly limiting methodologies. A semi-structured interview, it felt, would offer such a method and therefore an interview schedule formed the basis for the face-to-face interviews at the heart of the case study. To prevent the potential for endless interpretations of the data, a coding process created support for a formal

benchmarking of responses from which to draw more solid conclusions from the interviews.

In a deliberate effort to find genuine objective nature in the outcomes from the semi structured interviews and the case study as a whole, the researcher committed to experience the subject from the world of the college middle manager, via their personalised responses and stories. Such responses would form the key core interpretive data of the research.

4.4.3. Semi structured interview schedule design

When creating the interview schedule, it was important that attention was paid to Kvale (1996) who states, that:

‘The qualitative research interview seeks to describe and the meanings of central themes in the life world of the subjects. The main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say’ (Kvale, 1996).

Therefore, in creating the questions to be asked in an interview it was imperative to focus upon the key substantive issues, which had emerged from the literature review.

It was critical to ensure the interview schedule was concise and was asking questions, which were vital to the case study. Vagueness or imprecision was avoided in order to ensure the targeted audience had a clear conception of the issues under examination. Attention was also given to the importance of providing what Denscombe describes as:

‘The wording of the questions is one of the most difficult features of a questionnaire design. It is also one of the most important to get right’ (2008 p152).

Also important, was the fact that the interview schedule would require curriculum middle managers to share their life experiences (in their middle management role). The need for middle managers to be open and honest in their responses would be a key factor if a true reflection of the effective leadership of curriculum

middle managers was to be established. The questions needed to enable the interviewees to consider and discuss a mutual interest (to benefit both the college and individual) in order to make further improvements. Interview questions are a characteristic of what Kvale terms an interchange of views between two people on a topic of mutual interest (1996 p14). In other words, questions are directly asked in order to gain information on a common topic.

Having created the interview schedule it was important for this to be piloted (in order to ensure the researcher was clear as to how colleagues understood the process and methodology of collecting data). Oppenheim (1992), Morrison (1993), and Wilson and McLean (1994) describe a pilot as having several functions, to test the reliability, validity and practicability of the interview schedule. In order to test the following aspects, two pilot interviews were held:

- Planned interview structure.
- Suitability.
- Relevance.
- Clarity of questions.
- Selected recording method.
- The time required for each interview.

The Head of Learner Services and Head of Teacher Training were interviewed, and subsequently minor changes to the interview schedule were made to improve clarity.

4.4.4 The Interview Group

Table 5: Provides details of the respondent’s name, gender and years of experience in post (curriculum middle manager)

Name (Alias)	Gender Female / Male	Experience in Post (Years)
A	Female	5
B	Female	6

C	Female	3
D	Male	8
E	Male	2
F	Male	2
G	Female	4
H	Female	5
I	Male	3
J	Male	6
K	Female	3
L	Female	6
M	Female	2
N	Female	2

The above mentioned group of staff represented the total population of curriculum middle managers employed at the college on a full-time contract. These staff members reflected all curriculum areas and received remitted time to undertake the role of curriculum middle manager. Also, from the length of service in post, all had at the time of interview, between two and eight years' experience. Closer examination of individual respondents' background experience demonstrated that vast majority of staff had significant teaching experience and had been internally promoted to the post of middle manager.

The decision on the number of respondents was largely dictated by two factors:

- The need to limit the length and scope of the case study to a reasonable size given the time constraints, financial implications and accessibility.
- The researcher's own workload - a full-time Deputy Principal employed at a large general FE college.

These factors are common in much single researcher studies, as Denscombe describes:

'In practice research is a matter of choosing suitable methods – ones that are feasible given the resource constraints within which the investigation has to operate' (2008 p65).

The researcher was confident that curriculum middle managers would answer questions openly and honestly due to a personal leadership style based on listening and empowerment. Within this culture, curriculum middle managers are enabled to develop the autonomy to address poor performance; indeed, it is embedded within the wider culture of the college. Furthermore, the termly Quality Summit meetings with middle managers allowed the researcher to foster an open door, honest and transparent working relationship.

The research question was broken down into a series of themes as follows:

1. Establish the curriculum middle manager's perception of their role in relation to with the literature framework. The aim being to establish whether curriculum middle managers are leaders or managers.
2. The operational duties undertaken on a daily basis by curriculum middle managers. To establish the possible conflict between the role and actual duties imposed on the curriculum middle manager.
3. To explore the skills and competences of curriculum middle managers and also interrogates a degree of self-awareness and self-reflection. It aims to consider issues of accountability, autonomy and expectations.
4. To attempt to establish and highlight the need for further personal development in order to reflect organisational requirements and to bring about further improvements. In addition, the question will explore the participant views of achieving this improvement.
5. To consider the group of staff that the participant is leading and accountable for. It aims to consider issues relating to length of service and experience of staff being contributory in securing improvements.
6. To attempt to explore the characteristics of the staff and how this is forming/shaping each individual middle manager's leadership style.
7. To consider how curriculum middle managers reflect on their practice. Do managers follow any particular theoretical framework established in the literature review?

8. To explore the notion of reflective practice and support mechanisms to address any weaknesses recognised by the curriculum middle managers or by their line managers. To support the Ofsted (2008) suggestion that to secure improvements within any organisation, it requires all managers at all levels of the organisation to be robustly tackling underperformance.
9. How the organisational structure supports the curriculum middle manager to operate effectively (in order to secure improvements).
10. To establish if curriculum middle managers perceive any structural barriers to the process of implementing improvements.
11. The processes of the organisation and how these might influence the way in which curriculum middle managers undertake their role.
12. Establish the culture of the organisation in terms of ability to reflect on performance and adapt/realign accordingly.
13. Evidence of tangible improvement(s) secured by curriculum middle managers to support the leadership practice.
14. The unsuccessful leadership practices and the impact on curriculum middle managers' followers. It aims to consider issues of accountability and actions taken to address unsatisfactory outcome.
15. Reflect on further improvements in their leadership practice. The response to this question enabled me to reflect on the literature to correlate an overarching framework or the organisation to secure further improvements.

4.4.5 Data collection strategies

For this case study, primary qualitative data was collected from the college's curriculum middle managers using semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview enabled the researcher to cover themes and questions, which varied from interview to interview, ask follow-up questions and probe answers. The flexibility afforded in a semi-structured interview allowed me to explore other avenues of experience related to the case study, for example college communication strategies.

The letter inviting the curriculum middle managers to the interviews, this can be found in Appendix A, was designed to gain the voluntary commitment of the subject to participate in the research; explain the purpose and process of the interviews; provide assurances about the confidentiality of the data; and ask the interviewee not to confer with their colleagues in order to capture individual perceptions rather than collective views.

The importance of providing what Oliver describes as ‘a precise summary of the contribution required of the participant’ (Oliver 2004 p30) reflected the intention to ensure all individuals participating in this case study were made aware of their input prior to it commencing. The interview schedule questions, can be found in Appendix B, were given to the curriculum middle managers with the letter to give them sufficient time to reflect, thus avoiding potentially superficial off-the-cuff answers.

The interviews took place on a one-to-one basis. This allowed the researcher to question each interviewee face-to-face to capture their ‘*stories lived*’ (Clandinin and Connolly 2000 p20) on an individual basis. The interview questions were open and probing to allow respondents to decide the amount of detail they wished to give, thereby defining their own lived experiences. They were designed to generate meaningful responses relating to aspects of the theoretical effective leadership model developed from the literature review. Questions were grouped into themes, this can be found in Appendix E, to help a flow of thought during the interview, and subsequent data analysis. The total number of curriculum middle managers employed at the college is fourteen. It was important that if possible, all fourteen managers participated in this case study in order to establish as full a picture as possible of their experience, rather than relying on a sample. There were no difficulties in accessing the interviewees because the researcher had both informal and formal contact with the curriculum middle managers (due to their role of Deputy Principal).

It was important that interviews were held in a location that suited both parties; that is, a quiet place where an uninterrupted and confidential interview could take place. Each interview was scheduled to last between one and one-and-a-half hours, but time was allowed for an extension if required. A degree of informality was established during the interviews by, for example, providing light refreshments. This helped create an ambience conducive to an open, honest discussion. A careful approach to questioning was also adopted. Particular attention was given to the way in which sensitive issues were explored, such as establishing a possible link between leadership and negative outcomes. Attentive listening skills and appropriate behaviour was also important to demonstrate that the researcher did not project their own views.

A full record of each interview was compiled as soon as possible after it took place. This helped to ensure that there was no bias and to allow reliable data for analysis. Comprehensive notes were taken during the interview and also the responses of interviewees were recorded on audiocassette. An audio backup record of the interview was used in cases where the notes proved difficult to understand, or if a point was missed. Permission was granted from each interviewee to record the interviews prior to the interview-taking place. Following data collection, interviewees were all given copies of the interview records so they could be checked prior to data analysis. The purpose of this data validation exercise was to ensure that each individual curriculum middle manager's experience had been captured accurately and this also allowed each individual participant to make alterations to their account if they disagreed with the interview notes. All fourteen curriculum middle managers agreed to proof read notes of the interview and confirmed that these were a true and accurate reflection of the meeting. Most of the curriculum middle managers made no alterations to the meeting notes, however, four made minor alterations to their notes. These alterations reflected clarifying Question 2: the difference between leadership and management.

4.5 Approach to data analysis

Watling argues that analysis is not something that can only be considered at the end of the research (2008).

‘With qualitative data it is simply not possible or desirable to treat data analysis as a separate activity which is only done at the final stages of a project. The analysis of data takes place throughout the project. It is an iterative and persistent part of the research process’ (Watling 2008 p262).

The researcher’s personal experience supports Watling’s argument because throughout this case study reflection has taken place on the literature review and design of questions to reflect time constraints and staff availability. Watling describes this as a ‘key recognition - that analysis pervades each and every aspect of qualitative inquiry’ (p267).

At the outset of this case study, the key question was; ‘What is the relationship between middle managers’ leadership practice and quality improvement in FE? With this in mind, it was critical to formulate an approach concordant with Watling defines as ‘working within an epistemology framework’:

‘Searching for understanding rather than knowledge, for interpretation rather than measurement and for value rather than facts’ (Watling 2008 p267).

Analysis of the data was undertaken by using a process of structuring and coding recommended by Watling (2008). This allowed the interview note data to be devised into an appropriate format, which allowed analysis to be undertaken.

4.5.1 Interview data

The qualitative data established from the interviews was structured and coded in line with the Coding Framework, Appendix E. Two interview transcript examples can be found in Appendix C and D respectively. Each interview transcript was then divided into themes to demonstrate the respondent’s answers. This information was then transferred into an Excel spreadsheet to collate all responses for each question. The purpose of the use of codes was to provide a

linkage to the literature review. The fundamental aims of the use of interview was to provide evidence from curriculum middle managers to support or contradict the framework established from the literature review - a model of effective leadership practice at middle manager level.

4.5.2 Interview schedule data

As previously stated each respondent was given a code that identified the subject area and department. All questions from the interview schedules were entered into an Excel spreadsheet. Each curriculum middle manager's response against each question was entered into a separate section of the spreadsheet in order to provide data to examine collectively all fourteen responses to each question.

The combination of the interview and interview schedule data provided understanding, interpretation and values to the findings of this case study.

4.5.3 Evidence Triangulation

Triangulation is the method of comparing many sources of evidence in order to determine the accuracy of information or phenomena. There are two main approaches to triangulation: using several methods to explore the same issue; and asking the same questions of many different participants (Bush 2002). In this case, study, a measure of triangulation was achieved by independently interviewing all fourteen curriculum middle managers. A further level of triangulation was gained from the intimate knowledge and experience of the college possessed by the researcher, who also had access to the full range of organisational documentation, including detailed information on academic and financial performance for the last three years.

4.6 Validity and reliability

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2010 p133) argue that threats to validity and reliability can never be removed completely; however, the effects of these threats can be attenuated by attention to validity and reliability throughout the piece of research.

This case study has relied heavily on qualitative data therefore the validity needs to be addressed through the integrity, depth and richness of the data documented from the participants (Winter 2000). In addition, qualitative data must be subject to controlled and standardised processes to ensure variables are managed in order to eradicate errors and misinterpretation (Cohen 2002).

Yin (2002) suggests that throughout any research the researcher must constantly review, question and reflect on the processes of the study. Therefore, at the outset of this case study, the researcher defined the framework encapsulating the curriculum middle managers' role in order to ensure that any potential for the introduction of one's own views and preconceptions was thoroughly minimised. Appropriate support from academic research colleagues was accessed in order to address any issues that arose during the research period. For example, the external research supervisor suggested the requirement to embrace the naturally occurring evidence of curriculum middle managers operating in team meetings and managing staff. In addition, triangulation is a key methodology in validating qualitative data. Cohen, Manion and Morrison *et al.* (2010 p141) suggest 'triangulation is a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity, particularly in qualitative research'.

The researcher agrees the comments of Cohen, Manion and Morrison. Therefore, the researcher will test the data by establishing additional sources of information to ensure the validity of the data gathered from the participants.

Many academics argue that the meaning of reliability differs in qualitative and quantitative research. Reliability in quantitative research reflects what Cohen, Manion and Morrison highlight as:

'Dependability, consistency and reliability over time, over instruments and over groups of respondents. It is concerned with precision and accuracy' (p345).

For this case study, all participants in this research have an identical job role and responsibility. In addition, the performance of each curriculum middle manager is assessed in the same way. Definition of reliability in qualitative research is hotly contested amongst academics for example, Winter (2000); Stenbacka (2001); Golafshani (2003) replace reliability with the terms credibility, neutrality, conformability, dependability, consistency, applicability, trustworthiness and transferability. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) highlight that qualitative research reliability is the degree of accuracy and comprehensiveness of coverage for example, researchers' data and natural occurrence in the context of the investigation. The insider researcher role provided further challenge around data collection, for example, when asking curriculum middle managers questions around self-reflection and their own insights into how they think they could improve their performance. That question in particular may be loaded with the potential for the manager to believe that the researcher may receive their response judgementally from the perspective of senior leader rather than impartial researcher. Goghlan and Holian (2007) argue that researching one's own sector often brings challenges. Clearly, there is a need to 'put on different hats' as an insider researcher (Roth et al., 2007).

4.6.1 Participant Researcher - Insider Research

Sections of this chapter explore issues around the participant researcher and challenges as an insider researcher. It is important to acknowledge and then fully consider the impact of the researcher's own role within the case study organisation and how this may influence the research process as well as potentially the findings. Within the organisation, the researcher was afforded a unique perspective, which inevitably makes a difference to the research. There was a clear need for high levels of confidentiality, trust and sensitivity around the interplay between the researcher and practitioners involved however, multiple perspectives, rather than damage the findings, served to strengthen them as an the researcher's awareness of cultural, social and professional spheres supported a more rounded understanding of the data and its analysis.

The need for the researcher to develop reflexivity became an integral part of the journey to understand one's own position as the researcher and the insider within the research process. Kralik (2005) claims that reflexivity is a way of engaging in self-reflection about the research process, in order to enrich one's understanding of researcher and researched. But most importantly, its purpose is to reflect on concerns and practices that materialise in the research journey in order to facilitate the researcher to minimise his or her own preconceptions and increase the credibility of the research process (Glesne 2011, Minichiello & Kottler 2010).

Whilst doing insider research can be challenging, it supported the researcher in being able to learn powerful reflexive techniques (for example, journal writing, 'thinking-out-loud' techniques and diagramming). It would not however be possible to use these techniques without having experienced the issues associated with insider knowledge.

Consequently, this experience allowed the researcher to become reflexive in terms of accepting the concept of the insider researcher and to the aspects of the curriculum manager's role.

The critical analysis of the practice associated with college middle managers within the case study college was specifically aligned to the ambition to propose models for improvement and or new models for leadership and management to consider. The researcher was fully aware that findings from one case study, could not necessarily be transferred direct to that of another organisation. The experience however of having held roles within a number of colleges meant that the researcher was confident enough to suggest the findings and proposed models for practice would offer something unique and purposeful to the wider FE sector, rather than any generic guidance for good leadership.

The researcher was objectively aware of the influences that colleagues, internal politics, funding and quality agencies, other stakeholders as well as personal and career considerations may have on the approaches to research and the

interpretation of its findings. Semi-structured interviews intentionally would generate a core set of data for comparison but also would enable any unforeseen perspectives and insights, which may be outside of the researcher's initial considerations. The benefits of insider-led research are clearly those that accept that as an insider the researcher can be in a position of uniqueness that allows for an in-depth awareness of the critical matters around the topic and therefore can more adeptly filter for key factors and avoid superfluous material. The researcher is afforded a deep experiential knowledge of key issues and be in a position to make sense of them and create and deploy from within, the most effective research methodology applicable. The researcher in this position was also going through a learning process with time and focus through the methodology to step away from the issues normally immersed within and to reflect upon practice and impact against a semi-structured criteria and the adoption of a reflexive approach.

There are many definitions of participant observation. Denscombe (2008 p200) indicates participant observation is a method in which the observer participates in the daily life of the people under study, either openly in the role of researcher, or observing things that happen, listening and questioning people over a length of time. With this approach, it was important to be mindful of preserving the 'naturalness' of the setting to establish the organisational ethos and avoid inducing inappropriate responses on the part of participants. As Denscombe (2008) states:

'Only by experiencing things from the insider's point of view does the researcher become aware of the crucial factors explaining the culture or event' (p23).

In this case study, there is congruence with Denscombe (2008) in that participant observation as *an insider* provides a strong position to deal with the meaning of participants' points of view and allows the researcher to place greater emphasis on depth rather than breadth of data.

Raelin (2003) and Nixon (2001), both comment that there is significant evidence to support the notion of insider research investigations being beneficial to the success of organisations and providing a significant contribution to work practices. It is with this in mind that questions were devised, in order to gain some clear understanding of how middle managers practise effective leadership to secure quality improvements.

Ultimately and included in the finding from this study, the researcher as insider was able to focus upon aspects of practice in which the researcher has some control and would be able, based on findings, initiate improvements and change. The researcher within the organisation and or industry area is more able to convey findings in a form that will be understandable and of use to a wider audience. Working within multiple dimensions, it was expected and formed part of the structured approach that the researcher would be able to effectively move back and forth along a number of axes, depending upon time, location, participants and topic.

Table 6: Challenges as an insider researcher – adapted from Costley, Elliott and Gibbs (2010 p5)

<i>Negotiating access to your own work situation as an area being researched and securing consent for the research to take place</i> – approval for this research was obtained from the line manager.
<i>Promising anonymity and confidentiality to your own colleagues</i> – all curriculum middle managers were given the option to participate and written assurances was provided regarding information shared remaining confidential.
<i>Possibly challenging the value system of your organisation</i> – questionnaires and semi-structured interviews allowed participants to reflect on organisational barriers.
<i>Interviewing your own colleagues</i> – a dedicated time schedule was produced to limit any impact on the participant's job role.
<i>Managing power implications of your work and positioning as a researcher and as a practitioner within your research</i> – the location of the semi-structured interview was selected to neutralise any bias emerging from the researcher's role within the organisation under investigation.

Furthermore, Costley, Elliott and Gibbs (2010) argue that when researchers are insiders, they draw upon the shared understandings and trust of their colleagues with whom normal social interactions of working communities have been

developed. Therefore, it is important to recognise one's role within this case study to ensure that individual or organisational agendas do not influence this research. This can be avoided by establishing an academic underpinning of the case study and by demonstrating a critical analysis of the investigation.

Costley, Elliott and Gibbs (2010) comment:

'As an insider in your professional field, you have expertise and experience that gives you an advanced level of knowledge of issues in your area of practice' (2010 p6).

Therefore, the researcher needs to demonstrate impartiality, an open-minded approach and a fresh set of lenses on data to offset any criticism of the rights and responsibilities of an insider as a researcher.

Evidence of the interview records supports the strength of emotion, frankness about the roles and style of the senior management team, openness about individual success, failure and a critical reflection which supports the view that the participants were not intimidated or stifled by their relationship with the researcher. This evidence supports the researcher's assurance that any axis of power and hierarchy did not prevent any respondent from sharing their experiences openly.

4.7 Ethics

The importance of ethical concerns in research is reflected in the increase of relevant literature and regulatory codes of practice agreed by numerous agencies and professional bodies. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2010) suggest that a major ethical dilemma is the requirement for researchers to strike a balance between the demands placed on them as professional scientists in the pursuit of truth, and their subjects' rights and values potentially threatened by the research. This notion is relevant within this case study. Striking a balance between establishing key areas of improvement in the leadership practice of curriculum middle managers and the pursuit of an accurate current practice will be

imperative. Furthermore, Lee (1993) suggests that participants may even deliberately engineer situations where they are aware of the outcome of the research having a direct impact. In this case study, it is fully acknowledged that there is a danger of curriculum middle managers potentially providing relevant answers in light of the possible findings impacting on their current role. Therefore, it is imperative that all findings are triangulated in order to demonstrate the authenticity and currency of any recommendations.

Further examination of research ethics refers to:

‘The appropriateness of the researcher’s behaviour in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of a research project, or are affected by it’ (Saunders et al. 2003).

This study follows the British Education Research Association (BERA) guidelines (2011) appertaining to responsibilities to participants. The key issues likely to arise are in relation to informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, and the job role of the researcher.

At the outset of the study, the researcher was granted consent from their line manager, (Principal and Chief Executive of the institution), to undertake the project. An understanding was also reached that some of the research would be undertaken during work time. Care was also taken to gain informed consent by written agreement with the curriculum middle managers to undertake the interviews. Any refusal to take part was accepted because the would-be subjects of the research had the right to privacy (Collis & Hussey 2003). In addition, it was brought to the attention of the curriculum middle manager in light of any serious quality concerns arising during my research process would be subject to the normal quality assurance processes being applied.

Assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were given to the research participants at the same time that consent was sought. This was done formally by letter. This encouraged interviewees to give more honest and open answers

(Collis & Hussey 2003), but care was also exercised at all stages of the study not to breach the agreed rules (not least because of the researcher's line management role). It is possible, for example, that an exploration of an issue raised by a particular interviewee with other participants might have inadvertently identified the person who raised the matter (Easterby-Smith *et al.* 2002). Care to preserve the confidentiality of participants was also exercised when reporting on data, at which stage it may have been difficult to maintain the assurances that have been given (Wells 1994). The British Educational Research Association (2011) guidelines were followed in order to ensure ethical standards were adhered to.

Kervin (1992 p38) has drawn up a checklist of questions for carrying out ethical research and the researcher will seek at all times to ensure that the answer to all the questions is negative:

- Will the research process harm participants or those about whom information is gathered?
- Are the findings of this research likely to cause harm to others not involved in the research?
- Are you violating accepted research practice in conducting the research and data analysis, and drawing conclusions?
- Are you violating community standards of conduct?

Cohen Manion and Morrison (2010 p.76) suggest an ethical code which the researcher in this case study will adopt. The ethical code being:

1. It is important for the researcher to reveal his or her identity and background.
2. The purpose and procedures of the research should be fully explained to the subjects at the outset.

3. The research and its ethical consequences should be seen from the subjects' and institution's point of view.
4. Possible controversial findings need to be anticipated and, where they ensue, handled with great sensitivity.
5. Informed consent should be sought from all participants: all agreements reached at this stage should be honoured.
6. It is desirable to obtain informed consent in writing.
7. Participants should have the option to refuse to take part and knows this, and the right to terminate the involvement at any time and knows this also
8. Arrangements should be made to provide feedback for participants who request it: this may take the form of a written resume of findings.
9. The dignity, privacy and interests of the participants should be respected and protected at all times.
10. When ethical dilemmas arise, the researcher may need to consult his supervisor.

Finally, the researcher needs to ensure appropriate intelligence on which he can create a position of rational philosophy relevant to this case study conditions and based on personal and professional values.

'We stress the word rational since reason is a prime ingredient of ethical thinking and it is the combination of reason and a sense of rightness that researchers must keep faith with if they are to bring a rich ethical quality to their work' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2010 p75).

One of the most difficult ethical matters related to this case study was the position of the researcher (as Deputy Principal of the college where the investigation took place). Curriculum middle managers may have sought to create an overly positive impression of their effectiveness as leaders, and may have found it difficult to explore areas they believed they could improve. This potential for bias was minimised by providing written assurance to the curriculum middle managers that the interviews were not an evaluation of their work performance, and providing opportunities for discussion about any possible tensions between job

roles and the research. Furthermore, having extensive knowledge of the FE sector and full access to performance data, the researcher was well placed to triangulate sources of evidence. The college's culture of openness and transparency, and good professional relationships also helped to minimise this potential source of bias.

Educational research normally falls into two categories: general and sensitive research. General educational research is often conducted in instances where there is a requirement for information for example, improve student facilities. Sensitive educational research is far more intrusive. The researcher must be mindful of a variety of delicate issues for example, information being provided being used to change work patterns. Lee (1993) defines sensitive research as that 'which potentially poses a substantial threat to those who are involved or have been involved in it' (p23). In light of this, the researcher needs to take into account two significant issues in the planning and conduct of sensitive research. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2010) recommend that sampling and access to the participant must be robustly planned. Further examination of sampling and access is imperative for this case study. This is due to the nature of curriculum middle managers being instrumental in bringing about quality improvement. Therefore, gaining access and being accepted can be a slow process. However, Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) suggest that gaining access not only is a practical matter but also provides insight into the 'social organisation of the setting'.

The issue regarding sampling is far less problematic in this case study. The staff in the sample were fourteen curriculum middle managers, all undertaking an identical role with a slight variation in the numbers of students in their area and staff they managed.

4.8 Chapter summary – strengths and limitations

It is well documented that there is no such thing as perfect research (Denscombe, 2008) because every investigation requires some form of compromise. It is the researcher's obligation to acknowledge the reality of all limitations, and give consideration to what can be, and importantly cannot be concluded on the specific approach adopted. In this case study, four key factors relevant to this investigation were acknowledged. They are:

1. Resources - access to curriculum middle manager's time is limited in light of their role and responsibilities. In addition, the participants were not selected at random and do not reflect the whole population. It was imperative to work within interview times arranged and agreed with the participants.
2. Assumptions – at the outset of any research it is important to acknowledge that a review of literature will result in a theoretical framework being established that will underpin the research to support a specific argument. In this case study, it was accepted that qualitative and quantitative data gathered from the semi-structured interviews represent a focus on one instance of a particular phenomenon (with a view to provide their account of issues, relationship experiences occurring in that particular instance (Denscombe 2010 p32)).
3. Research Design - it is imperative that the researcher clarifies the scope of research and acknowledges issues that are not resolved. The sample size and subject matter being justified from the findings must support any generalisation. In addition, objectivity of the research in this case study is also a key area, which needed to be addressed in order to ensure the impartiality of the investigation and to avoid academic criticism.
4. The role of the researcher; it is important to recognise one's personal role within this case study. As stated earlier in this chapter, this role is as an *insider researcher*. This senior role within the college afforded a privileged position of access to curriculum middle managers, policy documentation and observations of leadership practice in action. Therefore, the

researcher's role in this study in terms of practitioner-led research and development is appropriate and relevant to inculcate organisational learning and enhance the effectiveness of individuals at work (Costley, Elliott and Gibbs 2010).

'In light of this, the boundaries of limitations within this study were acknowledged which resulted in identification at the outset of this case study, its overall worth and contribution to knowledge' (Denscombe 2008 p127).

There are no right or wrong templates for research, however, researchers are required to make choices when planning the research. The notion of 'fit for purpose' is critical, if the researcher is to ensure the research conducted can withstand academic scrutiny.

This case study embarks on what Bassey (1999) posits; what *is* 'Educational Research'?

'Critical enquiry aimed at informing educational judgements and decisions in order to improve educational action. This is the kind of value-laden research that should have an immediate relevance to teachers and policymakers, and is itself educational because of its stated intention to 'inform'. It is the kind of research in education that is carried out by educationalists' (1999 p39).

Therefore, in this case study, several methods of enquiry have been utilised in order to ascertain rich and detailed responses from participants. This ensures that an accurate landscape can be established while at the same time maintaining the reliability, validity and authenticity of this case study. The interview schedule enabled participants to initially reflect on their experience and practices in preparation for the semi-structured interview session. The responses from the interviews were then triangulated by reviewing college performance over the last five years. Key documents reviewed were Ofsted inspection reports and college self-assessment reports.

Creating an ethical code of practice for this case study was imperative, in light of the researcher being a senior manager. For this reason, (as discussed previously), a strict code of practice was adhered to.

Furthermore, as a part-time researcher, there were restrictions regarding time and resources, and so it was important to ensure that the methods deployed were not only appropriate to the case study but were manageable within the time constraints available to the individual.

The appropriateness and justification of the methodology being adopted for this case study will be open to academic scrutiny in light of its results and findings.

The next chapter provides details regarding presentation of data analysis and findings in relation to the case study college.

Chapter Five: Presentation of the data and findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides in-depth review of the context of the college background in which the curriculum middle managers were operating, together with interview data which demonstrates the disconnect between the college senior management team and curriculum middle managers. With a particular focus of senior managers, operating a centralised leadership model and the curriculum middle managers failing to appreciate the broader responsibilities expected of their role. Furthermore, the data analysis draws on the experiences of curriculum middle managers' responses to the research questions.

5.2 The college context

The case study was situated in a medium size semi-rural further education college. There was a lack of competition in the county for student places and the college was the only provider of full time vocational education and training. Therefore, the college enjoyed a healthy monopoly. The college structure consisted of a small senior management team of seven senior managers and fourteen curriculum middle managers, one hundred and thirty four full-time teaching staff, and two thousand five hundred full-time students. The college was the only provider of general vocational further education in the county, having formally merged with the land-based agricultural college in September 2008. Prior to this merger, the college had gone through a difficult financial period and was receiving annual financial support from the Government Funding Agency (Learning and Skills Council, LSC). The college also needed to address major quality issues, for example, student success rates significantly below national averages. The new senior management team in September 2005 restructured the college curriculum management team to ensure financial viability, and address issues around the quality of some areas of provision. This demonstrated the college management team's capacity to successfully merge with a land-based college with similar financial and quality issues. It was agreed between the colleges prior to the merger, that the Principal of the land-based college would retire and that a senior manager would join the college management team

(curriculum middle managers) of the combined college. In addition, it was agreed that three governors of the previous land-based college would join the new merged college board of governors. All staff of the merged college retained their previous curriculum responsibilities and conditions of service. This merger financially strengthened the college and provided comprehensive and sustainable vocational training provision, which supported the local and national skills agenda.

After the merger, the structure of the college was based upon groupings of staff course teams under the leadership of an Assistant Principal. The Assistant Principal met weekly with the curriculum middle managers and reported to the college management team (CMT). The college management team consisted of the Principal, Deputy Principal, four Assistant Principal's (curriculum), Financial Director and Director of Personnel. Formal meetings of the college management team occurred weekly, but informal meetings were held more frequently. The Deputy Principal at the college was responsible for all academic affairs including quality improvement policies and procedures and student support services. The college quality team consisted of one full-time dedicated coordinator who had a very limited experience of quality procedures and intervention processes within the educational landscape. The background experience of the coordinator was customer services and administrative and lacked in depth educational quality improvement understanding. This limited skill set of the quality coordinator was evident when each curriculum middle manager's self-assessment report was validated. For example, curriculum middle managers failed to meet deadlines set by the quality coordinator and on many occasions, the curriculum middle managers regarded quality measures and processes as a barrier to success (and ended up attempting to simply pay lip service to what was expected). This created a 'tick box' culture and quality assurance was less than embedded or fully assured in a rigorous manner. This resulted in the Deputy Principal having to oversee all aspects of quality improvement measures. This included meeting each Curriculum Assistant Principal on a fortnightly basis to monitor the faculty performance. For example, this would include student attendance rates, retention

rates, quality of teaching and learning in the classroom, staffing issues etc. Access to the college management team was through formal cross-college meetings or by appointment only.

Communication between the college management team and the rest of the college staff comprised a monthly college newsletter, sent to all staff at the end of term meeting in attendance with the Principal or occasionally a cross-college email on specific topics. Curriculum Assistant Principals were tasked to communicate regularly with curriculum middle managers and share information on topics of discussion from the college management formal meetings. The college management team meeting agendas were compiled by the Principal of the college. There was little or no input from other members of the college management team.

The following extract illustrates the key agenda items being discussed at the college management meeting on 22 September 2008:

1. Student enrolment numbers.
2. Financial budgets.
3. Health and safety.
4. Staffing levels.
5. A new college prospectus.

From the above agenda it is apparent the college's key focus was on financial matters and curriculum reporting and due regards to quality assurance was a secondary concern. The Deputy Principal would meet Curriculum Assistant Principals separately to discuss academic matters and student performance. At the college management meetings, each Assistant Principal would report on student class sizes and performance against budgets. Considerable time would be earmarked to discuss in great depth each group of students to ensure maximum efficiency was achieved. This finance focused approach resulted in teaching staff adopting a culture of 'bums-on-seats', where contribution to the

bottom line and maximisation of resource was prioritised, even above quality and student success in some cases. Furthermore, this was evident at the cross-college management team meeting on 29 September 2008 when the college Principal stated that 'fewer students will result in less money therefore fewer teachers and managers will be required'. Whilst this may have indeed been a business critical reality, the emphasis on this aspect as well as this seemingly threatening stance, was potentially damaging to morale and performance.

Curriculum middle managers were under extreme scrutiny to recruit sufficient students to make programmes of study financially viable, teach thirteen hours a week, manage a team of full-time and part-time staff, attend cross-college meetings, organise parent and open evenings and complete all quality performance measuring documentations, for example course reviews, curriculum self-assessment reports, curriculum quality improvement plans teaching staff appraisals, organising student and staff timetables, updating the college prospectus for further and higher education programmes etc.

This relentless role of the curriculum middle manager resulted in several curriculum middle managers negotiating an exit strategy from the college employment. The notion that the roles and responsibilities of the curriculum middle manager seemed to be seemingly limitless and with no boundary in breadth or depth, meant that expectations could be expanded to suit with little or no regard in terms of any person's ability to actually carry out those expectations in a successful and sustainable manner, and with due regards to work life balance and job satisfaction.

On one occasion, the college Principal stated at the college management team meeting that 'far too many curriculum middle managers are lethargic with their approach when managing their curriculum teams and are failing to take on board the financial difficulties'. The Financial Director further supported the college Principal's statement by emphasising that 'staffing costs needed to be tightly controlled' (CMT meeting, 12 December 2009). In viewing perhaps only the

bigger picture and challenges around funding, such messages reinforced a perception of frustration in the performance of the curriculum middle manager. Clearly being close to front line delivery, it was here where the problems occurred, and here where the problems would need to be fixed. Anyone not on board with that point of view was potentially seen as 'non-corporate'.

Such responses arose from a request to the Curriculum Assistant Principal to be allowed to split a group of twenty-eight students into two groups and as such illustrate the college management team's preoccupation with quantifying and measuring student group size, rather than potential concerns around impact upon quality.

The teaching staff relationship with curriculum middle managers and senior staff was fragmented. Lecturers were believed by managers to be working hard and achieving the best possible student results. However, senior managers believed the teaching staff to be sloppy in administration and demonstrating a lack of support for management efforts to ensure the college was financially healthy and sustainable as a business. There was a clear undertone of mistrust to the point that curriculum middle managers were placed under increased scrutiny, and were frequently perceived to be failing in their duty. This finally resulted in the college management team deciding to restructure curriculum faculties and to remove curriculum middle managers who were deemed to be underperforming.

Teaching staff often complained of the college management team's very hard-hitting approach to embed business strategies, including efficiency measures designed to increase the workload of staff. The additional efficiency measures included administrative tasks and organisational changes being specified without consultation and with no opportunity for discussion or consultation to seek views from the lecturers.

Furthermore, the college apprenticeship student success rate in 2005 was extremely low, at 37%. This was due to the college practice of enrolling students

onto the next level of qualification and not completing the first qualification. This practice was a college approach, which was discovered during a cross-college management meeting where curriculum middle managers were challenged by the Deputy Principal to establish underlying reasons for poor student success rates. The curriculum middle manager for the construction department challenged the Deputy Principal by stating that:

‘Students are enrolled annually, if students fail to complete their first qualification the timetables do not allow teaching staff any extra time to support students to finish off and it enabled the college to draw down government funding.’

When challenged by the Deputy Principal:

‘You are responsible for timetabling students to complete qualifications before enrolling students onto their next level qualification and Ofsted would view this practice to be inadequate because the college are failing to meet the needs of its students.’

The curriculum middle manager for the construction team was somewhat surprised to be challenged back and did not realise the autonomy of timetabling being his responsibility. It had not been made clear to him and he had previously felt that he was abiding by a college-wide way of ‘doing things’. This meeting therefore, was a watershed moment for the curriculum middle managers responsible for the apprenticeship programme of study. Furthermore, a number of other curriculum middle managers further explored the ability to change programme delivery models to meet student and employer needs. As previously stated, curriculum middle managers were reminded by the Deputy Principal that it was important to tailor programmes of delivery to meet student and employer needs to achieve the best possible success rates. This also demonstrated that there had been a lack of effective communication regarding the curriculum middle manager’s autonomy to design and deliver apprenticeship programmes in a flexible mode to meet different subject areas requirements. A culture of expectation and compliance around central college direction and procedure had prevented the curriculum middle managers from being able to devise their own

bespoke approaches for success and more worryingly, failed to foster a healthy degree of challenge and debate, creating scenarios where mistakes were repeated as part of a cross-college unchallenged convention.

The merged college's student success rates were largely good, though there were small pockets of very low success rates, which required immediate attention. However, the greatest challenge for the new management team was to ensure financial viability of the new land-based campus. This required the college Principal to rethink the initial restructure of the merged college. The financial challenge was due to too many programmes with small group sizes. This resulted in consolidating and merging a number of programmes of study to increase group sizes to a minimum of fourteen.

This exercise of curriculum rationalisation also resulted in a small number of programmes being deemed no longer viable and subsequently closed, with six members of teaching staff being made redundant. Whilst this was not popular with the existing staff at the land-based campus, the outcome however, resulted in the campus being financially viable.

To ensure parity of esteem with the rest of the college faculties, the college Principal decided to appoint an Assistant Principal for the land-based campus to provide a clear line of communication to curriculum middle managers and teaching staff.

The above actions illustrated the Principal's desire to firstly ensure the financial instability is addressed and secondly demonstrated the land-based campus faculty being treated equally in line with other college faculties.

These observations provide an overview of the institutional context for this study, and also an indication of the root of some of the foreshadowed problems mentioned in chapter one. The next section provides the wider context around the curriculum middle managers working landscape, which is also highly relevant.

5.3 The context of college curriculum middle managers' working landscape

The case study interviews took place during the second academic semester during which curriculum middle managers were addressing quality issues within their departments (which had been identified in the previous academic year). There were also significant and demanding aspects of planning for new cohorts for the forthcoming academic year, which needed to be completed and presented to the college management team. In addition to this, the in-year performance of each curriculum middle manager regarding student success rates and the quality of teaching and learning was being scrutinised.

Furthermore, the requirement for the further education sector to operate within a strict and increasingly limiting business model was a key government challenge to every college in England. For example, the government funding agency LSC would provide funding to deliver so many NVQ qualifications and full Level 2 and 3 qualifications. This resulted in curriculum middle managers being set aims and outcomes to of which they had little or no say. This practice was, at the time of the interviews, a live issue in the case study college, and was seen by most curriculum middle managers as driven down by central government imposing these arbitrary outcomes and unrealistic expectations. During the interviews, curriculum middle managers accepted that the government were imposing student outcomes by way of funding cuts and increasing challenges and reform within delivery. However, interview data collected demonstrates curriculum middle managers were mostly being unhappy about the way in which they were implemented by the college's senior team, and the emphasis that tended to be placed upon a formulaic approach.

Simultaneously, the college management team's desire to operate as a business based on data performance metrics, contribution levels and efficiencies, was creating a culture of unhealthy and potentially demoralising competition amongst the curriculum middle managers. Whilst this was accepted by a few curriculum middle managers as a way of working, the vast majority of middle managers desperately struggled to operate in this new developing landscape. For example,

one curriculum middle manager argued that the government's policy to drive colleges to operate in a business model was impossible:

'You cannot make money out of teaching students because each student requires a different level of support and the government assumes each students starting point is the same' (CM/T/72).

However, it became apparent that the vast majority of the curriculum middle managers struggled with the concept of operating in a culture of profit making to pay for overheads. Whilst middle managers understood the planning policy and the principles underpinning this process there was evidence to suggest a lack of ownership and the view that a predetermined outcome had already been established. For example, no curriculum middle manager had challenged student recruitment targets, and the fact that curriculum expenditure budgets had been trimmed and so on.

The drive of competition and the introduction of an increasingly competitive climate and ethos following the merger emerged as a significant area of concern to the curriculum middle managers in this study. Curriculum middle managers felt under pressure from college senior managers to make efficiency gains, for example by employing more part-time staff instead of full-time staff, in order to become increasingly competitive. This competition had a clear and negative effect on the working relationships of teaching staff and curriculum middle managers, promoting a culture of having to operate more efficiently than each subsequent year. An example of this expectation included the notion that contribution levels targeted at faculty level were increased by 3% each year. This was a particular challenge for the new land-based faculty in light of considerable consumables costs associated with running agricultural, horticultural, animal management, blacksmithing programmes and operating an organic farm. The curriculum middle managers responsible for the land-based faculty constantly felt that they were continually operating with ever-declining budgetary constraints (and at the same time having to improve operating efficiency levels). This competitive culture resulted in some middle managers being unable to

demonstrate the necessary business acumen and the required nerve in delivering to an increasingly demanding efficiency led delivery model, which undoubtedly would affect quality.

All of the curriculum middle managers appointed were outstanding teachers but no formal training was offered in order to prepare them for the post. Having to quickly learn 'on the job', the range of required management skills in terms of operating their departments as highly efficient and financially viable areas resulted in many of these managers spending considerable amounts of additional time to understand and learn the financial business planning processes of the college. In this study curriculum, middle managers have overwhelmingly stated that the financial aspect of the post was a major challenge. The pressure of having to operate with greater efficiency levels resulted in a lack of time being spent on supporting and leading teams of teachers and support staff to improve the quality of student experience.

For most curriculum middle managers, their role had simply become a communication conduit with a top-down approach. The following view was typical:

'My role appears to be constantly completing documents to satisfy the senior managers. There is very little opportunity to discuss teaching and learning practices with other colleagues and I am fire-fighting to keep on top of my job' (CM/T/1).

Close examination of the job description for the curriculum middle manager clearly demonstrates the post holder having to provide curriculum leadership and management for their programme areas. Furthermore, there are specific tasks within the role for which the curriculum middle manager is responsible for. These being:

1. Leading the development and delivery of high quality programmes of study from Taster to Level 4, ensuring the current high quality of provision is maintained and emerging curriculum developments addressed.

2. Leading the development and delivery of a wide range of adult and community education initiatives throughout county ensuring delivery of a high quality portfolio, which meets the needs of all stakeholders.
3. Ensuring that all professional curriculum issues are addressed and embedded within the programmes ensuring that the best possible method of accreditation and assessment is embedded within courses, meeting the requirements of the college and the Learning and Skills Council.
4. Recognising new trends and generating ideas for new programmes particularly in terms of maximising the potential for classes in the rural areas.
(Extract from the curriculum middle manager's job description)

Whilst the above four specific tasks do not explicitly demonstrate the tension between the curriculum and financial challenges, the curriculum middle managers in this case study highlighted the overwhelming pressure of teaching thirteen hours a week, as well as managing and providing a leadership role for the department.

5.4 Expectations of the college curriculum middle managers

It was expected that curriculum middle managers routinely monitor content of programmes and undertake classroom appraisal to ensure that high quality delivery is maintained. Some middle managers viewed this as a positive opportunity to eradicate poor performance, however too often; they were unable to fully address poor performance. This was exacerbated by a fragmented approach between the human resources department and the quality improvement team. One curriculum middle manager stated that:

'Poor teachers hide behind the teaching union rep to defend their poor performance and that the college lacked a formal performance management process to deal with such teachers' (CM/T/07).

There were positive aspects of curriculum middle managers having to manage staff inductions and monitor all personnel issues relating to their team; this

allowed managers to utilise their personal approach to disseminate the college ethos and values from their own interpretation. Whilst one could argue that this opportunity allowed middle managers to motivate their own staff through personalised approaches and the application of their individual leadership ideologies, critical analysis of this autonomy highlights a major weakness; each individual was not given a clear format to follow to ensure a consistent message was being shared with all new staff. For example, whilst the Deputy Principal for curriculum and quality was trying to address quality issues, many staff continued to see student numbers in the class being the highest priority.

This was demonstrated during a team meeting where teaching staff often referred to 'bums on seats' to ensure teaching staff had sufficient students in the class. The Deputy Principal's strategy requesting the right student, on the right programme and with the right support was having very little impact. This furthermore demonstrated a breakdown in communication within the college management team who had all signed up to the ambition of ensuring students would be recruited with integrity to improve the college's student success rates.

It was the role of faculty Assistant Principals to communicate to all curriculum middle managers how the college's strategy aimed to recruit students with quality and integrity, keeping the quality agenda at the forefront of business. This resulted in the college Principal realising the need to personally engage with curriculum middle managers to validate and triangulate the college's strategy to improve student success rates. For example, the Deputy Principal implemented a process called '*Courses in Intensive Care*'. The purpose behind this process was twofold; firstly, this process involved only the teacher and the curriculum middle manager meeting the Deputy Principal to share with him their analysis of poor performance and their improvement strategies.

These meetings provided the Deputy Principal with the relevant information around student recruitment practice, quality of teaching and learning in the classroom and the leadership and management of the programme area.

Secondly, this process allowed the Deputy Principal to empower the teacher and the curriculum middle manager to explore different quality improvement initiatives. This process also for the first time allowed the Senior College Manager (Deputy Principal) to regularly meet with teachers and curriculum middle managers to discuss progress of quality improvement initiatives.

In some quarters of the college, staff were somewhat surprised that a senior manager was taking a very keen interest in the classroom activities and wanted to meet them in person to discuss. Whilst the meetings would undoubtedly appear challenging (underperformance of programmes, and so on), they would also be supported, helping tutors to acknowledge that the Deputy Principal was interested in how he may be able to understand the context for the performance and explore ways to support where necessary. It was not always seen as this, for example, one curriculum middle manager described the process as:

‘A naughty schoolboy having to report to the head teacher’ (CM/T/09).

The college’s vocational curriculum offer, provided an additional challenge for all curriculum middle managers. This challenge took the form of continual professional development (CPD), in terms of industry upskilling – the requirement to ensure all teaching staff are well trained and experienced in their field of delivery (and with current knowledge of contemporary developments within their specialist area).

The college system to manage staff training operated within two spectrums. The first being, all staff attended three mandatory staff development days. Staff training during these three dedicated days was predominantly based on mandatory training, for example, Health and Safety or Equality and Diversity. In addition, feedback from the lesson observation process would provide cross-college themes and areas of improvement. The second spectrum was to expect specific staff training pertaining to the subject curriculum area. This request would require a business case being made to the Deputy Principal to demonstrate the

potential impact within the curriculum area and was subject to finances being available. Furthermore, there was a finite budget for staff development activities, which resulted in very few requests being approved. The ability of the curriculum middle managers to initiate curriculum staff training programmes often materialised only when there was a legislative requirement to deliver vocational programmes. For example, within the Construction department all in the electrical installation staff having to upgrade their vocational qualifications to the latest industry regulations to ensure sector currency and meeting the examining body requirements or a mandatory qualification requirement to assess student work A1/V1 qualifications.

The administrative role for the curriculum middle manager within the department required timely compilation and submission of all quality documentation as requested by the Assistant Principal. Whilst largely all curriculum middle managers successfully completed in year and end of year quality documentation to demonstrate areas of strengths and areas of further improvement required, too often these requests were seen by curriculum middle managers as a paper exercise to satisfy the senior management team. A critical analysis of completed documentation demonstrated a variety of responses when dealing with teaching and learning quality matters. For example, some curriculum middle managers would highlight within the quality improvement plan the need for team meetings to take place to address low student success rates. Whilst this can be, a tool in agreeing to robust actions there was a lack of tangible outcomes, which could demonstrate a measurable impact. This demonstrated the need for middle managers to be provided with clear guidance when writing quality improvement plans. The general consensus amongst the curriculum middle managers was that the quality improvement documentation appeared as a static, reflective measure, rather than a live document, which was being routinely discussed at curriculum management meetings to focus on efforts to address and identify areas of curriculum improvement. As one put it:

'I update the quality improvement plan when the quality coordinator reminds me to because I am too busy sorting out the day-to-day running of my department' (CM/T/11).

This suggested that quality improvement strategies were perceived as an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy adding to the burden of actually supporting improvements rather than helping. College teachers are reluctant to undertake moderation of programmes unless additional remission time is allocated for this role. Therefore, this role of moderation and the preparation of external verification role fall within the remit of the curriculum middle manager. This is a critical role because the failure of a successful external verification visit can lead to programmes certification being withdrawn and the college's ability to no longer claim certification or credit student achievements.

The preparation for the external verification visit requires the curriculum middle manager to have a cohesive systematic plan in place to demonstrate quality assurance processes in accordance with the awarding body regulations and that these are being fully met and the students' standard of work meets the national benchmark. Small pockets of curriculum middle managers highlighted some teaching staff being very rigid and not flexible to accommodate the external verification visit requirements. When challenged for reasons of non-compliance from teaching staff, a theme began to emerge around curriculum middle managers' failure to put in place at the outset a clear timetable of assessment and internal verification, valued as being critical factors.

This demonstrated the college's inability to achieve a consistent approach across college to ensure a robust verification model being embedded and monitored prior to the commencement of the academic year. Furthermore, there was a lack of in-year testing processes and procedures regarding readiness for external verification visits. One overarching view from all curriculum middle managers was:

‘The external verification process is critical to my department to demonstrate validity, accuracy currency, relevancy and sufficiency of the qualifications we offer and the failure to successfully negotiate an external verification visit challenges our personal integrity as a manager and leader of the team’ (CM/T/10).

The task of engaging teaching staff in assisting in all aspect of student enrolment and ensuring prospective students receive appropriate guidance and advice before undertaking their programmes is vital for the curriculum department especially when many students have multiple offers from other colleges and private providers. The notion of specialist curriculum tutors recruiting their own students predominantly increases the potential high student success rates, however this does little to evidence a joined-up cross-college approach to ensure that there is consideration of ‘*right student right course*’, which may mean for example the student is supported to attend with colleagues in the Apprenticeship team, rather than the full time BTEC they applied for.

Largely, curriculum middle managers welcome the opportunity to manage and lead student recruitment campaigns with the cross-college marketing department. However, the interpretation of entry requirements, together with the curriculum middle managers allowing teaching staff the autonomy to interview and make decisions on which students are offered a place (as well as the pressure of financial viability of class sizes), provides a dichotomy for the curriculum middle manager. For example, some teachers apply a more flexible approach when interviewing students and are far more interested in ascertaining commitment towards one particular course or level rather than supporting them regardless based on pre-attainment of qualifications.

In other cases, some curriculum teachers are far too rigid in demanding that all students have five A–C grade GCSEs to meet the entry requirement for their qualifications. The added complication of getting a minimum of fourteen students in the class for financial viability reasons in some instances may compromise the tutor’s personal standing and decisions may be subject to consideration of

viability or even job security going forward. Analysing both processes of recruitment when teachers are making decisions regarding an offer on a programme of study demonstrates neither process being totally reliable. A common view presented by one curriculum middle manager was:

‘It is important to allow classroom teachers the flexibility to make students offer of programmes of study subject to a combination of the interview outcome and qualifications on entry because this process empowers the teachers to assess the raw material and the challenges he or she may need to prepare for’ (CM/T/13).

In addition, curriculum middle managers highlighted that not all teachers across all departments systematically participate or take ownership at recruitment selection events. Therefore, this results in some teachers inheriting students subject to a colleague’s decision. This brings the further challenges for the curriculum middle manager in encouraging all teaching staff to participate in recruitment selection processes and also respecting fellow colleague’s decision to allow students to study on the programme. One curriculum middle manager reported that:

‘This was creating a major tension between his teachers because the recently appointed teacher was extremely keen to participate in the recruitment selection process and therefore was conducting many of the interviews. Whilst a more experienced teacher with a considerable number of years teaching experience was not participating in the recruitment process but was very critical of the new teacher’ (CM/T/14).

This demonstrated the need for the curriculum middle manager to have buy-in from all teaching staff to participate in the selection process or accept a fellow colleague’s decision. There was need for the college to agree and provide a clear set of common considerations to ensure that all staff could fairly and with reasonable equity, make informed judgements using impartial advice and guidance to all students, no matter who completed the interview. With a lack of such guidance and clarity, managers and tutors were vulnerable in terms of abiding by a set of common standards and values. Such lack of clarity, it could be argued, placed managers and tutors at the mercy of potential criticism further down the road where by decisions are deemed to have been ill fated.

Ensuring all classes run cost effectively and to satisfy the financial needs of the college was a critical expected aspect of the role for the curriculum middle manager's post. The college Financial Director would provide a template of predetermined values, for example part-time hourly rate charges, full-time hourly rate charge, minimum group sizes, maximum teaching hours per qualification etc. This would then allow the curriculum middle manager to populate the spreadsheet with the anticipated student enrolments. There was a tendency by all curriculum middle managers to agree class sizes to be targeted at the minimum class of fourteen. Closer analysis of this practice shows the college's failure to not reflect on actual student numbers from the previous year. This would result in an overall student target, which was based on a policy approach rather than historical intelligence. There was also an underlying current of threat of redundancies if insufficient students were recruited and the desire to create a teaching staff structure, which reflected an eighty-twenty, split of full-time and part-time teaching personnel to maximise cost effective method of delivery whilst retaining full-time staff to manage each programme of study. To ignore historical data, local intelligence and to overlook any in year recruitment patterns was to place at high risk the planning assumptions for the following year.

Curriculum middle managers' common view was that curriculum planning process was controlled by the college Financial Director with very little flexibility and gave the appearance of being more effective than it actually was:

'It's a load of rubbish, the financial director has already decided on how to spend the college budgets. My department brings in more money than others and I am bailing out other inefficient departments. I can prove that my department is funded by the government twice the rate of some other curriculum subject areas' (CM/T/1).

Curriculum middle managers who failed to operate within the set financial budgets were robustly challenged by the College Financial Director. For example, any curriculum middle manager who was in danger of over spending their

allocated budget would have the responsibility of financial management removed. The Financial Director's argument to support his action was that he was in charge of all college finances and was accountable to the board of governors for any over-budget expenditure. This practice in some instances undermined curriculum middle managers' confidence and their ability to manage budgets. Furthermore, there was no formal reprimand for any curriculum middle manager who mismanaged their budget neither was there any training made available for curriculum middle managers to manage budgets more effectively.

Another critical area of college efficiency was ensuring all full time teachers completed their contractual eight hundred and twenty hours of teaching over the academic year. This measure was used to determine any additional part-time budgets for teaching. However, there was no allowance made for staff sickness or additional hours of teaching required to support students requiring extra tuition. This resulted in any unplanned staff sickness being covered by full-time staff or the curriculum middle manager having to provide cover. In instances where the curriculum middle manager provided teaching cover, this placed immense pressure and a heavy workload on the manager. This led to the potential effectiveness of the curriculum middle manager's role being highly compromised. For example, such cover would limit the time available to identify where issues emerged or to support staff and intervene where necessary. Neither was there any college wide incentive scheme to reduce staff sickness. In addition, vital quality assurance processes and documents were not adhered to or completed in a timely manner.

The general view of curriculum middle managers of this system was that whilst the college finances clearly needed to be closely controlled and monitored, the system was deemed to be far too rigid and not flexible to embrace the autonomy of expertise required or address any long-term staff sickness. But a major issue for the curriculum middle managers in this study was the loss of financial management responsibility. One curriculum middle manager described the process as:

‘Outdated practice which does not reflect current challenges we face in the further education sector and a lack of trust in the curriculum middle manager’s ability to manage money and more importantly very little support from the college to train managers regarding budgetary control measures’ (CM/T/16).

Managing all the physical materials and equipment required for the programmes was a key role especially for subject areas, which heavily relied on equipment and consumables. Whilst the curriculum middle manager may not have been an expert in purchasing and maintaining academic equipment, it was the responsibility of the curriculum middle manager to ensure all aspects of health and safety are fully met and records of equipment maintenance are maintained. This aspect of the role required the curriculum middle manager to liaise with cross-college support managers to access their specialist knowledge and skills. Curriculum middle managers used the expertise of cross-college support area managers to lever additional resources to improve the student experience in the classroom. For example, engineering and construction equipment often needed to be replaced in light of high usage by students. The college health and safety manager would review equipment reports and curriculum middle managers request for any new equipment. This process also allowed the curriculum middle managers to demonstrate a cross-college role of dialogue and teamwork.

All curriculum middle managers reported positive outcomes when liaising with cross-college support area managers. One curriculum middle manager stated that:

‘The college support area managers are outstanding; they provide a service which is underestimated which allows us to maintain high standards practical delivery with the latest equipment’ (CM/T/17).

The viability of all programmes is the process of effectively marketing your product, in this instance full-time and apprenticeship courses to ensure maximum participation on programmes. The curriculum middle manager whilst being set challenging recruitment targets had unfettered access to the college marketing department. The college senior management view was that the best people for

marketing programmes of delivery are curriculum teaching staff and curriculum middle managers. Therefore, it was the role of the middle manager to liaise with the college marketing team in order to provide subject specific intelligence appertaining to the best possible places to market and target potential students for their programmes of study and also the mode of the marketing strategy. This was particularly successful in areas where curriculum middle managers had regular dialogue with the college marketing team. However, there were a small pocket of curriculum areas, which struggled to recruit adequate number of students.

Closer examination of these areas demonstrated a lack of engagement from the tutors and the curriculum middle managers to maximise the opportunity to market their programmes of study. When challenged about their lack of engagement with the cross-college marketing team the two curriculum middle managers responded by stating that:

‘It’s the marketing team’s job to go into the local schools and provide information on our courses. We have been available for all interviews for students who attended but it appears that this year students have decided not to follow a career in Public Services or Medical Receptionist’ (CM/T/18).

This view of the college marketing team being responsible for bringing in students for interview was seen by the senior college management team as current practice. The senior college management team viewed this approach very negatively, forming a general consensus that the staff within these two areas clearly were not switched on and failed to embrace all the messages regarding the educational sector in a choppy sea of ever-changing government policies and occasionally shark-like competitors’ (Collins 2006 p4). Furthermore, the staff within these two areas were the longest serving members of staff with traditional values of education and practices. For example, the vast majority of the staff had become disengaged with the college’s sense of having to operate within financial constraints and the need for a collective approach for college staff to work with a team ethos. There was an apparent ever-widening gulf between the value sets of

these staff, with that of those who realised that the college, for better or worse, had to operate as a business, and demonstrate sustainable growth and success against increasing competition. Where this was accepted and understood, responses from staff and managers were more positive. The role of the effective curriculum middle manager was to address this issue - and the performance management process and procedure was there should they be required to adopt it.

The role of the curriculum middle manager also required an external facing approach to maintain regular and effective liaison with all stakeholders including the local Council, rural outreach centres and other providers of services and accommodation. The new business approach being adopted by the further education colleges sector in light of government policies for colleges to engage with employers to form and to shape the curriculum delivery to meet the skills demand, required the curriculum middle manager having to draw upon teaching staff and his or her contacts within the industries represented within their department and to set up employer forums.

The key principle for all curriculum middle managers was to develop working relationships with employers and to develop new programmes of study and provide opportunities of industrial updating for staff. A vast majority of curriculum middle managers had no or very little experience of visiting employers in the workplace to seek their views on the skills agenda and neither had they secure knowledge of effective strategies to seek support in developing new curriculum programmes. The college employer engagement team supported some curriculum middle managers to engage with industry. However, the lack of dedicated time and experience of curriculum middle managers resulted in very little success in engaging with employers. Curriculum middle managers viewed this aspect of their role as an important part however, with the ever demanding role of middle management, this aspect of their job role was not a priority for them and basically the outcomes were never fulfilled. One curriculum middle manager stated:

‘There are only so many hours in the day; the college needs to decide what my key priorities are. I am currently struggling to keep on top of my job as it is. Everything new seems to be pushed down onto the curriculum middle manager to carry out or lead. I am here late at night just trying to keep my head above the water’ (CM/T/19).

One clear process for each curriculum middle manager to demonstrate clear leadership is through the participation in the college’s staff appraisal scheme both as an appraiser and as someone being appraised. This process allows the curriculum middle manager to assert their leadership style and identity. For example, there were some curriculum middle managers who demonstrated an outstanding student success rate and have meticulous curriculum planning and who have embedded assessment processes, which are consistently followed by all teaching staff leading to high rates of student success, whilst in other areas student success is not high.

Close examination of staff appraisal documentation highlighted that some curriculum middle managers were not utilising effectively the appraisal process to address underperformance. For example, curriculum middle managers failing to set clear measurable targets for teachers to improve student success, not reflecting on lesson observation, student feedback and external verification report feedback on standards of student work. These missed opportunities support a lack of leadership and management in some curriculum middle managers’ skill sets. Furthermore, one has to ask who had oversight of all appraisal documentation to monitor the standard of curriculum middle managers completing these with staff and what processes were in place to monitor the in-year progress of staff appraisal targets. It was unequivocally apparent that there was a gap in the appraisal process appertaining to curriculum middle managers not being trained to carry out appraisals of staff and a lack of oversight at senior management level for failing to recognise and address this issue.

Several curriculum middle managers agreed that the college needed to have a clear set of performance indicators for all teachers to be measured against.

However, another curriculum middle manager argued that teaching staff had concerns about the veracity of internal performance indicators:

‘There are too many internal assessments of performance indicators already.... For example, the lesson observation process, student attendance data, retention, achievement and success rates. Then there is the added pressure of the external verifier assessing your marked work’ (CM/T/20).

Whilst some curriculum middle managers supported the view that performance indicators were useful, one curriculum middle manager pointed out the need to avoid participating in a mechanistic approach:

‘We are constantly sitting around informally in staff rooms and in meetings where we talk about how one can do things better. I have structured my team meetings where each member of the teaching staff has to participate in suggesting working practices they favour. In addition, we discuss all students that are at risk of not successfully completing as a matter of routine’ (CM/T/21).

Curriculum middle managers in this study viewed the impact of the financial priorities and their practice as being a deep-seated negative and somewhat overbearing culture. The critical demand of achieving student enrolment targets was challenging their individual values of education and training practices. Furthermore, these managers had not experienced such demands when they commenced their career within the further education sector.

Formerly, there were no demands in place to recruit a set number of students per class. In addition, curriculum middle managers saw their role radically changing from raising standards of quality of teaching and learning in the classroom to an administrative role, which was about completing an endless amount of documentations to satisfy their line managers. Most of the curriculum middle managers were appointed from their teaching posts into a middle manager’s role with no formal training. Internal college interview processes were followed which consisted of a presentation and a formal interview. The presentation asked curriculum middle manager candidates to share their vision and how best they see to increasing student numbers for their curriculum area and how they would

improve student success rates. This presentation and interview would be in front of the college Principal, Deputy Principal, Financial Director and Director of Human Resources.

Curriculum middle managers' experience of this process was that they felt the importance of demonstrating their leadership and management knowledge and experience would be best served by the two following approaches:

1. Leadership – analysing curriculum middle managers' presentations for a period of four years, the leadership question in all cases followed a very familiar pattern. For example, increasing student numbers, introducing a number of new qualifications, liaising with external stakeholders to bring in additional income to the Department and expanding into new subject areas.
2. Management – close scrutiny of curriculum middle managers' interview presentations highlights in the vast majority of cases, the management presentation centred on improving staff efficiency, reducing staff costs and addressing quality matters, which included poor teaching and declining student success rates.

From the presentation, curriculum middle manager interview candidates would be then asked a series of questions around for the key topics. These being:

1. Leadership - these questions would be asked by the college Principal.
2. Financial management - these questions would be asked by the college Director of Finance.
3. Quality Improvements - these questions would be asked by the Deputy Principal of the college.
4. Human resources - these questions would be asked by the Director of Human Resources.

After all prospective curriculum middle manager candidates had been interviewed; the senior managers would deliberate and appoint the most suitable candidate in their opinion.

The experiences of curriculum middle managers in this case study supported that the process of recruitment was fair and consistent. However, a major criticism of the process was that the individual middle manager who was successful was not thereafter, given adequate support in bringing to fruition their leadership vision. Furthermore, curriculum middle managers felt their identity from the grassroots of teaching and learning expertise was not being fully utilised in light of the constant fire-fighting culture to improve the financial and operating cost efficiencies. For one curriculum, middle manager who had been recently appointed highlighted that:

‘I expected to be given a mentor to support me in my new role and expected my line manager to follow up my presentation vision for the department to ask for an implementation plan...no one to date has bothered to ask me how I am doing in my new job’ (CM/T/25).

This view was consistent with that held by other curriculum middle managers, that the imposition of the curriculum middle manager interview process lost its momentum, energy and the drive in light of no accountability to deliver the leadership presentation outcomes and a sense of loss of individual identity due to having to follow a pre-set culture and environment.

Therefore, it was not the interview process that the curriculum middle managers were critical of, but the lack of a formal support mechanism and the loss of their rich knowledge and experience of improving teaching and learning. After all, it was the qualities of the curriculum middle manager in the teaching post, which propelled the individual to have ambitions and a desire to improve standards of teaching and learning first and foremost.

Within the college, there was no shortage of candidates wishing to pursue a

career at curriculum middle management level. Most lecturers welcomed the opportunity to demonstrate their ambitions to pursue a career into a first tier management post. However, the senior management scrutiny and the relentless approach to increase student numbers whilst reducing the cost base was a significant challenge. The following two opinions in this case study were prevalent:

‘I have no problem with being set targets and having to tackle staff with poor student success rates but it’s the relentless drive from the top-down with little or no consultation’ (CM/T/26).

‘The demand of this role to implement new policies and bring about change is fine; it is the lack of time and the plethora of administrative duties which are drowning the job role’ (CM/T/27).

The emphasis upon the workload, administrative duties and the relentless scrutiny of senior managers to achieve financial targets was a strong recurring theme for all of the curriculum middle managers in this study. The positive outcome that was considered of value was not the appointment process, but the desire and commitment to achieve the best possible student experience, despite unrelenting management demands being a significant concern.

The college’s twin strategic approach was to embrace both financial and quality challenges and this created a dichotomy for curriculum middle managers when trying to prioritise and appease different stakeholders, especially if the financial strategy is fixated on the college being financially viable and given a higher priority. A strategy based upon such specific targets was seen to carry with it the risk of reducing the standards of teaching and learning in the classroom, in order to meet the pre-specified targets.

‘If senior managers’ set expectations regarding minimum students per course and we are going to be held accountable to meet these thresholds, we will need to accept all students and lower our expectations of student entry requirements. This will obviously bypass the college’s strategy of the right student, on the right course with the right support’ (CM/T/29).

At the heart appeared to be a strategic policy, which encourages maximising student numbers and is given the highest priority within the organisation. This was thought to compromise some aspects of the curriculum middle managers' role to drive quality improvement initiatives. A view strongly supported by all interviewees in this study, who believed a good education was a passport for life, which enables and empowers students to gain higher levels of qualifications or secure employment leading to improved life chances.

5.5 Teaching and learning and assessment standards in further education

A critical theme, revisited by all curriculum middle managers in the study, was that of the need to raise standards of teaching and learning in the classroom to further improve student outcomes. Whilst recognising the need for efficient and effective management of their curriculum department, too often curriculum middle managers were increasingly hesitant to explore and drive through new quality improvement initiatives from the grassroots during such times of a financial constraint.

The pre-occupation with balancing the budgets was further seen as a negative impact on the development of student potential. All curriculum middle managers in the study, expressed a view that:

‘The students should be our top priority and at the heart of organisation and all policies need to reflect that impact on the students’ experience’ (CM/T/56).

The above view raised a major concern that teaching, learning and assessment was seen as a secondary item of importance and the need to shift the focus to teaching and learning from a financial income priority was critical. One curriculum middle manager stated:

‘I have a concern about the lack of support given to me to challenge teachers who are not performing well in the classroom. I have some teachers who fail to support students with weak English writing skills...There is a tendency to fail these students, even though they have 100% attendance’ (CM/T/89).

A further curriculum middle manager condemned the lack of senior management failing to support or intervene in removing classroom teachers with high levels of sickness and a number of tutors who consistently failed to improve their lesson observation profile. This interviewee stated:

‘Senior managers are only concerned with quality of teaching and learning in the classroom when we get a notice of an Ofsted inspection...We are then expected to get all of our tutors to deliver outstanding teaching and learning in the classroom’ (CM/T/99).

All curriculum middle managers understood they had a responsibility to look after the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom, and address issues identified in student teaching and learning surveys to further improve the student experience.

The following comments support a deep-rooted culture (of which the curriculum middle managers were concerned) in regards to their leadership and management practices needing a greater priority.

‘Education and training is about teaching and learning being at the heart of the organisation, all curriculum middle managers have a pedigree of outstanding teaching and learning practice, it is imperative that our knowledge, skills and experience are not forgotten by senior managers, but are harnessed to further improve the teaching and learning practice collectively in the classroom’ (CM/T/101).

All curriculum middle managers in the study were still practising teachers in the classroom, therefore providing these managers with first-hand experience of the challenges other tutors were facing. Some curriculum middle managers viewed the classroom teaching practice as an essential part of the role to remain in touch with shop floor activities.

In addition, there was high value placed by the curriculum middle managers’ upon leading their departments by demonstrating to the rest of the curriculum team their teaching, learning and assessment skills. One interviewee emphasised the point:

'My current teaching, learning and assessment empowers and allows me automatic access to all my teachers in my department because this is a core aspect of the job which requires all members of staff to work together' (CM/T/103).

Whilst the above comments are anticipated, the prevailing theme is one of the curriculum middle manager having currency and common ground, which enables the manager to tackle potential poor teaching in the classroom or provide support to all subordinates. One clear advantage each curriculum middle manager in this study had was that the curriculum subject teams they were managing reflected their personal specialist subject area.

One of the key aspects of the cross-college quality cycle to monitor quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the classroom is the requirement of the curriculum middle manager to conduct 'learning walks'. These are short fifteen to twenty minute lesson observation sessions to provide the manager with first-hand experience regarding how well teachers are performing in the classroom. Whilst one has to acknowledge that a short fifteen to twenty lesson observation will not provide a detailed insight to all aspects of the teaching taking place in the classroom, it will however, provide initial indications for the curriculum middle manager to assess how teaching and learning is being delivered. This process is seen as a developmental aspect of the teacher's classroom practice. Therefore, no lesson observation grade is provided and tutors are given a short report consisting of two key themes. These being:

1. Areas of strengths; and
2. Areas of further consideration.

This process also enables the curriculum middle manager to 'walk the shop floor' in order to ascertain an overview of his or her curriculum teaching team. In addition, there are no requirements to provide teachers with advance notice of

this short lesson observation process and it is anticipated curriculum middle managers complete one assessment of each teacher per term.

The general consensus of all interviewees was that the short lesson observations in theory were an excellent tool to assess on a continuous basis the quality of teaching and learning. However, the high volume of administrative work had prevented the curriculum middle managers from systematically conducting these visits.

One interviewee pointed out that:

‘I have yet to complete any short lesson observations.... No one has bothered to chase me for these reports. Whilst it’s a good idea, I will wait for the formal lesson observation report from the cross-college quality team’ (CM/T/105).

All curriculum middle managers in the study perceived that they had a facilitative, enabling role to work with teachers within their department to create a vibrant culture of innovation; adopt student centred pedagogy and harness the technological opportunities of teaching, learning and assessment.

This empowers and encourages staff to develop a peer review relationship with other colleagues to explore a critical aspect of their teaching practice to further enhance teaching practices. This also emphasises the critical nature of the curriculum middle managers’ role in the classroom – validating, first-hand the performance of tutors and engaging with students in order to seek their feedback on targeting further improvements in teaching and learning.

In this engagement, the relationship is not one of curriculum middle manager providing specialist subject knowledge. One interviewee described his role as one of a facilitator in an educational setting providing access to knowledge, appropriate learning environment and ensuring essential feedback into the quality process.

The model which emerged from the interview data was a distant memory from the idea of the curriculum middle manager as someone who is actively given time to use their vast experience in teaching, learning and assessment practices in order to address and improve poor performance within the curriculum area. The college student teaching and learning surveys, student success rates and learning walks are the critical set of information, which the curriculum middle manager will triangulate to ascertain the impact of his or her teachers on student outcomes.

This information is used by the curriculum middle manager to compile the department self-assessment report to inform the quality improvement plan. The curriculum middle manager is given the autonomy to articulate and prioritise the curriculum quality improvement action points. These are validated by the Deputy Principal and practising Ofsted inspector to validate the robustness of the judgements made by middle managers. Furthermore, this quality improvement plan devised by the curriculum middle manager is monitored centrally by the cross-college quality department.

Curriculum middle managers viewed the self-assessment and the quality improvement plan process as a valuable tool to assess performance. However, their frustration was demonstrated by some curriculum middle managers in having to complete a number of self- assessment report pages, which were totally irrelevant.

This demonstrated that the 'one size fits all' approach of the college was inappropriate and not fit for purpose. This was especially applicable to the college commercial course department and short programmes with no formal qualifications.

The landscape within which curriculum middle managers operated provided a challenging environment to raise standards of teaching, learning and

assessment. However, it was evident that there were a number of critical components to raise standards of teaching not being addressed. These being:

1. Poor teaching not tackled by the senior managers.
2. Curriculum middle managers not systematically supported to embed a consistent cross-college approach.
3. Curriculum middle managers' workload inappropriate.
4. Quality tools to raise standards of teaching and learning not being systematically implemented.
5. Quality documentation inappropriate for some curriculum areas.
6. Curriculum middle managers' teaching, learning and assessment experience insufficiently harnessed and deployed in order to raise standards.

5.6 College teachers, curriculum middle managers and senior managers managerialism: a top down management approach

Curriculum middle managers are often seen in a practical setup in which they are given instructions from senior managers to implement new policy and practices. Senior managers see the role of curriculum middle managers as that of change-bringers. Analysing interview questions for the role of curriculum middle manager for engineering, it was noted that many of the interview questions centred on transformative aspects and the individual's approach in achieving such goals. However, from the shop floor many teachers' expectations of the curriculum middle manager were to share their concerns and bring about change to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy. For example, completing MIS data returns, multiple registers, student destination information, and so on; teachers viewed such tasks to be time-consuming with little relevance to their practice and wasteful of time that could be more productively spent on curriculum-related tasks.

From this perspective, the curriculum middle manager is a critical role, on one hand having to satisfy the college senior managers and on the other hand having

to decode senior management information to get teacher buy-in to implement change (whilst also satisfying their demands). From this, it is clear that the curriculum middle manager plays a pivotal role in a college to embrace both strategic *and* operational tasks. The additional demand of teaching thirteen hours on top makes the post of curriculum middle manager one of the most stressful jobs in further education sector.

One of the interviewees stated that:

‘Senior managers constantly passed down all administrative tasks without understanding the purpose of the request and many of these requests are duplicating information which already exists on college MIS systems. This demonstrates senior managers don’t get it’ (CM/T/112).

Another curriculum middle manager perceived that senior managers had ‘a lack of understanding of what was involved in teaching and learning and not interested in supporting us’ (CMT/125). This was a commonly held view amongst the vast majority of interviewees.

Lack of support felt by the curriculum middle managers gave rise to high levels of tension and frustration in that they had delivered curriculum programmes with financial cutbacks, and despite this, the lack of visibility of senior managers was having a negative impact on staff morale. This was summarised by several curriculum middle managers commenting that:

‘Senior managers each year are exerting immense pressure to deliver more for less without understanding the impact of this on the student experience’ (CM/T/128).

The college curriculum middle managers’ perception of senior college managers was that teaching of students was seen to be undervalued due to several years of annual financial cuts and very little investment in resources.

The senior college managers were perceived as disengaged with classroom practice and therefore this resulted in curriculum middle managers not fully

embracing the expectations set out by the college senior management team. For example, curriculum middle managers were asked to improve room utilisation by timetabling teaching and practical sessions more efficiently. However, a number of curriculum middle managers ignored these instructions and decided to make no change. When challenged to explain why class sessions were not more efficiently timetabled, a number of curriculum middle managers stated that:

‘The new timetabling framework fails to recognise that many students have part-time jobs whilst they attend college full-time...A number of students have to travel in using public transport which dictates the duration of the teaching day’ (CM/T/138).

Curriculum middle managers argued this clearly demonstrated a senior management team failing to understand the context of the college’s student population.

This difference in philosophical understanding between the college curriculum and senior managers recurred as a theme in the accounts of many curriculum middle managers in the study. Several interviewees commented upon the management style of the senior management team as ‘disjointed and failing to engage with teaching and learning aspect of the college business’, these managers felt that the senior management team should try ‘to empower and support curriculum middle managers to raise standards of teaching and learning in the classroom’ (CM/T/132).

These underlying differences of perception created a culture of inconsistency in light of lack of staff consultation; poor communication and autocratic target setting resulting in curriculum middle managers having to decode many policy change requests at a very local level. This resulted in senior college managers failing to understand the challenges facing curriculum middle managers when attempting to implement new practices.

Curriculum middle managers in this study were not interested in criticising the senior management team in having to make difficult financial decisions. The

difficulties and pressures under which middle managers were asked to operate was the key difference.

‘Senior management need to remind themselves every now and again that a lot of what is being imposed on us is grinding us down...Senior managers need to be removing barriers to enable us to work more effectively with the teaching staff’ (CM/T/145).

The primary aim of this study is upon the perception of the curriculum middle managers. The resentment expressed by a vast majority of interviewees towards the top-down style of management practice in this college is strongly evidenced within the interview data. There is also a strong theme emerging from the data which points to curriculum middle managers’ leadership and management practice being hampered. The curriculum middle managers’ pedagogical grounding offered a more realistic viable approach to raise standards of teaching and learning. At the same time, the approach being adapted recognised the need for a college to be efficiently run.

‘Student needs must override all other financial demands, but this does not mean the college cannot run financially efficiently’ (CM/T/156).

This point of view represented by this curriculum middle manager and others reinforced that the senior management team need to bear in mind what the college is for and who the college is for. The key point here emphasises the importance placed by curriculum middle managers on educational values being given top priority. Curriculum middle managers felt that college senior managers seemed to have lost sight of the institution’s core business of student learning and achievement. Students were no longer seen as students, but income units.

Whilst the financial agenda had heightened and symbolised the college’s key priorities, it is important to note that its effects were not uniformly regarded negatively by the curriculum middle managers in this case study. There was a view, which the following extracts illustrates, that an improvement in college finances brings certain advantages:

'I believe that if the college finances improve this will hopefully enable some investment in the resources for students' (CM/T/176).

'The college finances improving will be a big advantage to demonstrate to the government's skills funding agency that the college's management team is operating effectively to achieve best value for money' (CM/T/156).

Even where curriculum middle managers had reservations concerning the college senior management team resolving financial problems first, they also acknowledged that the college's overall financial position needed to improve in order to break the cycle of negativity around financial investment for student resources. The freedom of being given the opportunity to request capital investment to update equipment was seen by the curriculum middle managers as a significant goal of achievement.

One curriculum middle manager argued that the college senior management team needs to differentiate the curriculum planning process to reflect areas of curriculum which have high number of students being treated differently and not a 'one size fits all' process.

In so far as the curriculum middle managers were critical of the senior management team, there were also signs that most curriculum middle managers had a shared and clear view of what would constitute an appropriate model of college financial and quality improvement management. For some, this created a dichotomy, which they found very difficult to embrace.

Primarily, this was due to the lack of training and development received by middle managers to prepare them for the different challenges and the accountability associated with the job role. This was stated by several curriculum middle managers who supported the following position:

'The lack of training and support in this role has resulted in managers not fully understanding the full scope of financial difficulties and challenges the college was facing.... If we had been given the opportunity to contribute in exploring how each faculty could potentially improve the bottom line for

every course we deliver, I am sure I could consider operating a different teaching delivery model' (CM/T/149).

Curriculum middle managers highlighted that there was no formal training programme regarding their needs and in addition, a clear induction process which highlighted and spelled out the key aspects of their operational leadership and management responsibilities.

There was a widely shared view that curriculum middle managers should communicate their own values in improving the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom:

'My expertise and experience is lost and not utilised by the senior management team to improve student outcomes because there is a top-down quality improvement agenda. Senior managers at the college have been out of touch with teaching and learning and assessment for far too long to fully understand what is happening' (CM/T/137).

This gives further weight to the argument that the curriculum middle managers were not operating in an autonomous context, but found their own values undermined by the way in which the college senior management team failed to embrace and harness the vast range of experiences of curriculum middle managers.

The number of management failings that were mentioned by interviewees in this case study were seen to emanate from an inconsistent and unclear approach to the management of the college. The following extracts again show an awareness of the need for the senior management team to fully understand the challenges faced by curriculum middle managers:

'I feel if the senior management team attended my staff curriculum team meetings they would immensely benefit from listening to the challenges teachers face in the classroom with students who have been enrolled on programmes of study to meet the minimum group size targets' (CM/T/131).

Another interviewee suggested that:

‘Curriculum middle managers’ accountancy skills were deemed to be far more important than pedagogy in the eyes of some senior managers’ (CM/T/136).

It is clear from what curriculum middle managers say that the model of leadership and management which is being thrust upon these managers has accountability and responsibility for the implementation of government policy changes and meeting quality and financial targets. However, the absence of opportunities to engage in dialogue with the senior managers and a top-down management style which did not understand (or so it seems, value or care about) actual curriculum activity, contributed to the identity of curriculum middle managers being flooded by constant financial challenges surrounding the college in this case study.

The evidence of emergent and divided values and priorities within the data reported in this chapter focussed analysis in the direction of the existence of a shared curriculum middle manager culture and the leadership and management characteristics. This territory seemed a fruitful one to pursue, since the curriculum middle managers themselves clearly felt that the top-down management target setting culture and the lack of pedagogy discussion at senior management level of the college was impeding the success of the curriculum middle manager leading and managing quality improvement issues. It also appeared significant to the writer, that whilst the senior managers were asking middle managers to embrace a number of the new initiatives such as all students being timetabled to study Maths and English functional skills and online study skills packages being delivered all Level 3 students, all these initiatives appeared to be in jeopardy as long as values and priorities differences between curriculum middle managers and college senior managers were allowed to persist within the organisation.

The divide between middle managers and senior managers appeared often deep-rooted. Their value sets were different and it was clear that some form of bringing together was necessary to find some common ground. This would

potentially provide the opportunity for curriculum middle managers to be recognised and valued and thus enabling them to establish a sense of autonomy and identity of contribution (in order to improve student outcomes). The following chapter further explores the themes of the individual curriculum middle managers' leadership and management approach, but also explores the important points of articulation, which had been identified in the interview data. It identifies the critical elements of the curriculum middle managers' role in strengthening their identity and suggests the extent to which senior managers can contribute in removing barriers of conflict to allow middle managers to express themselves and regain job satisfaction.

In the next chapter the researcher sets out an in depth discussion reflecting the proposed model from the literature review for Curriculum Managers Leadership and Quality Improvement Practice against the findings of the case study college.

Chapter Six: Data analysis and discussion

6.1 Introduction

It is argued, in this chapter that the curriculum middle managers in this study negotiated their way through the demands of leadership and quality improvement environment, by maintaining a central position, which embraced the senior management team's expectations and at the same time seeking to get buy-in from their followers. Surviving and operating effectively in this middle ground was key to the sustained success of the role. The vast majority of curriculum middle managers shared a culture centred on their primary area of expertise - the teaching and learning process.

The degree, to which all curriculum middle managers exercised their leadership autonomy, remains an open question. The interface between senior management members and teaching staff culture represented a dichotomy in this further education college for the curriculum middle manager.

The culture to improve the college's financial circumstances by recruiting additional students and simultaneously improve the quality of the student experience to secure improved student success rates blurred the role of the curriculum middle manager. This culture and practice are discussed, in this chapter and it is recognised that this tension of expectation significantly influences and impacts upon the curriculum middle managers understanding of leadership and quality improvement practice. The analysis then proceeds to explore and establish some key features of the leadership practice and quality improvement cultures.

6.2 Re-statement of the research question

The appraisal of the literature, which explores issues related to the management and leadership role of curriculum middle managers working within further education, confirms a broad consensus that this particular group are key in implementing policy change and also in developing and securing improvements at practitioner / tutor level. It is also clear that curriculum middle managers are a

critical link in translating the strategic priorities of senior management team with front-line staff.

The assumption however that outstanding classroom teachers develop naturally into good or outstanding curriculum middle managers, is challenged by this study. It was established that the vast majority of curriculum middle managers had been recruited from the active pool of tutors at the time and much emphasis was placed upon the success of the tutor in that role, when selecting those to be appointed as managers. It was clear that the supposition was that successful tutors make highly effective middle managers. Prior research led the writer to question this assumption and furthermore the phenomena that these middle managers have the appropriate and relevant management and leadership skills, attributes and experience to address quality matters and take decisive and effective action where necessary.

The study therefore set out to explore the territory of curriculum middle managers' role, reflecting upon the concept of educational values held by these staff, the ever-changing government educational reforms and the institutional responses to such policies. The quality assurance of teaching, learning and assessment processes are persistent and powerful areas of debate and intervention within the further education sector and are the primary battleground on which curriculum middle managers are measured by internal and external stakeholders.

The research question, which focused the study, was: 'What is the relationship between curriculum middle managers' leadership practice and quality improvement?'

The curriculum middle managers in this study articulated tensions, which remain prevalent in the further education sector. Foremost was the tension between the curriculum middle managers' leadership practice, which was deep rooted in the value of education, and the contradictory government policies being embedded within the sector, which were informing and shaping the practice and approach

of the curriculum middle managers. The interview data clearly supports curriculum middle managers as being alert to the realities of government policies, and in many cases sympathetic to the further education sector having to change:

‘I don’t support the notion of the government constantly asking us to deliver so many qualifications against targets..... But in the terms of students being educated and trained to achieve qualifications which lead to higher levels of training or employment is a sensible approach’ (CM/T167).

The curriculum middle managers were fully aware that the pressure to operate financially efficiently and to meet the college funding criteria to maximise income was imperative. Several accepted that it was all to do with how many students were enrolled and how many successfully completed the qualification for the college to achieve its financial targets. However, these managers articulated a disconnect between the college’s financial challenges and the aspirations of high student success rates.

This theme is characterised in this chapter as one of a major feature of the curriculum middle managers’ leadership battleground. The curriculum middle managers’ challenge to operate in this environment is a theme, which permeated their responses, reflected in the data presented in the previous chapter. The particular phenomena of a top-down management style further fuelled the argument that the college senior manager’s failure to recognise the volume of demands being made of curriculum middle managers was resulting in the erosion of a sense of autonomy in demonstrating leadership at middle management level within the college in this case study. This view was shared by the vast majority of the interviewees:

‘The college senior managers are keen to speak to us when they need information or when certain tasks need to be completed. Where are these senior managers when I need support in the curriculum team meetings and where can discuss my views and ideas to improve the student experience?’ (CM/T196).

At internal Quality Summit meetings with curriculum middle managers, the college Principal was far more forthright in the terms of middle managers bringing about quality improvement in their curriculum areas:

‘We need to hold onto students to ensure the college meets its funding target and at the same time we need to ensure all students successfully complete their programme of study’ (Quality Summit meeting notes, 7 May 2010).

As highlighted previously, Elliott and Crossley (1994) argue that in the FE sector there can be a strong educational management emphasis on quantitative approaches and a lesser focus on quality. However, the curriculum middle managers indirectly questioned the senior management team’s in-depth understanding of the complex nature of recruiting students with integrity and values of education which would benefit the recipient of the teacher’s expertise, and not just pursuing the a ‘bums-on-seats’ analogy to meet funding targets.

Indirect questioning in itself offered some insight into cultural expectations whereby curriculum middle managers were expected to carry out the directions given down to them, and not to challenge them. In worse case scenarios, challenges were seen to be anti-corporate and middle managers felt it best to keep their thoughts to either themselves or within trusted members of their team.

The landscape within which the college operates is characterised by government led policies and processes and the college senior management team’s leadership and management attribution. The notion that colleges operate within a business framework to deliver against government set targets has resulted in the college senior management team focusing primarily on funding targets. It was clear in some of the responses of the middle managers that if autonomy for making decisions (which may or may not lead to improvements) was taken away, then with it must go the accountability for those decisions made elsewhere. There was a dangerous lack of ownership resulting in an ‘us and them’ attitude in some

cases. Therefore, this leads to a culture of coasting, for example, accepting that some students will not succeed and not all teachers need to be outstanding.

This finding is supported by the latest Ofsted Annual Report by Sir Michael Wilshaw who stated that:

'All our evidence shows that it is good leadership-and particularly good leadership of teaching and learning-that makes the biggest difference to school and college standards.... In the good and outstanding colleges seen by inspectors, leaders focused on ensuring consistently high quality teaching. They worked well with local employers when developing their curriculum offer and tackled long-standing weaknesses' (Ofsted Annual Report 2015 p16).

Furthermore, the Chief Ofsted inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw poses a question within his annual report:

'If the importance of leadership is so widely recognised, why has more not being done to develop good leaders?' (Ofsted Annual Report 2015 p16)

However, analysing outstanding college Ofsted inspection reports during the period 2013-15, there are clear and unequivocal themes, which resonate throughout these organisations. These are:

1. Leaders and managers at all levels of the college working relentlessly to ensure that learners experience outstanding teaching, learning and assessment.
2. The constant focus of senior leaders in teaching and learning leads to very high levels of achievement. Leaders and middle managers provide excellent resources that teachers and learners use effectively in teaching and learning.
3. Middle leaders have direct responsibility for standards and for learners' achievement.
4. Teachers and managers work together to improve teaching and learning through robust self-assessment course reviews.

5. Communication at all levels of the organisation is clear, which enables all staff to have a clear understanding of strategic goals of the organisation. (Ofsted Outstanding inspection reports 2013–2015)

The quality imperative driving this agenda recognises the middle manager's role being supported relentlessly by the senior managers of the colleges.

During the interview process, curriculum middle managers confirmed their personal desire and passion to improve the student experience through outstanding teaching and learning. However, they also raised the issue of minimum class sizes being a fundamental distraction and the lack of support to address performance management issues.

One interviewee stated that:

The lesson observation process is flawed because I have a number of tutors who have been observed in the classroom who have been awarded satisfactory lesson observation outcomes, but student success rates on their programmes are low. There is nothing that I can do with these staff' (CM/T187).

This supported a fragmented quality assurance approach at the college. Whilst senior managers' expectations were to empower curriculum middle managers to address underperformance, the college support systems failed systematically to address the underlying failures to eradicate poor performance. The senior management team's failure to recognise this further fuelled the characteristics of the curriculum middle managers' practices.

This was further supported by the curriculum middle managers' argument that their autonomy and responsibility as a middle manager/leader was undermined by senior managers' constant demand on embedding new initiatives and the one-sided top-down leadership style. This was evident when curriculum middle managers' described the Quality Summit experience. For example, curriculum middle managers would attend a dedicated meeting with the Deputy Principal

and Principal of the college to report on the performance of their curriculum areas. During this meeting, the curriculum middle manager would have to justify student retention and predicted success rates. There would be no mention of the quality of teaching and learning (in terms of the formal lesson observation process) at this meeting, additional support required to support students who may be at potential risk, opportunities to discuss progress of new initiatives, student survey data, staff views and so on.

This was a missed opportunity for the two most senior managers of the college to engage with curriculum middle managers to provide support and listen to concerns from the 'shop floor'. As previously, stated, outstanding educational colleges have a relentless approach from senior leaders to improve the quality of teaching and learning by having a clear understanding of the challenges facing both curriculum middle managers and teachers in the classroom.

The impact of such leadership and quality developments upon the curriculum middle managers in this study extended beyond the college management teams. It was a requirement for teachers and other classroom support staff to embrace the culture of management practices to improve the quality of the teaching and learning experience received by the students within the context and characteristics described in the previous chapter. The secondary regard, which the senior managers in this study had for the quality of teaching (and learning and the perceived ineffectiveness to recognise the tangible long-term benefit of quality improvement initiatives in addressing underperformance), resulted in inconsistencies not being challenged or addressed. Furthermore, it is argued that, the cultural characteristics devised by and for the senior management team within this college setting, was more focused on a financial business framework (in light of the college's perilous financial status), rather than a deliberate lack of desire on the part of senior managers to improve via a dedicated focus on more effective engagement with the learners.

The curriculum middle managers' practices varied according to their teaching and learning and personal leadership experience. The vast majority of curriculum middle managers confirmed that their expectations of leading their curriculum teams were often compromised in light of enforcing senior management team's instructions. For example, the minimum class size for teaching was set at sixteen students and no classes were to be split unless the group contained thirty-six students.

This hard-nosed approach resulted in a number of curriculum middle managers experiencing difficulties in convincing teachers to support this policy in the classroom. From the interview data a significant weakness highlighted was the inability of curriculum middle managers to hold difficult conversations with their followers (who had previously been their teaching colleagues). The changes in job role from the teacher to curriculum middle manager within the same curriculum team also compromised some middle managers' ability to robustly address quality improvement issues.

Once again, this highlighted the fact that some curriculum middle managers were not fully embracing the expectation of senior managers to embed new practices. This highlighted a major weakness within the college in this study, this being that curriculum middle managers appointed from within the same curriculum subject areas were struggling to differentiate the distinction between their previous teaching role and their new middle management role. Therefore, this resulted in several curriculum middle managers failing to address poor teaching and learning in the classroom. It is argued, that the transfer of the role with inadequate support for the middle manager fuelled this situation, resulting in the new middle manager not recognising that a different approach was required to lead their fellow teacher. No longer could these teachers, be seen in the same light.

The senior management team's failure to recognise this difficulty being experienced by curriculum middle managers ultimately resulted in the college failing to address in a timely manner, inconsistencies in teaching and learning

and poor student success rates. In addition, the college senior management teams approach when interviewing internal and external candidates for curriculum middle manager roles failed to recognise if any support or mentoring may be required for the newly appointed middle manager.

Examining interview questions used when appointing curriculum middle managers further supports the primary focus of the college senior management team on financial matters. For example, several questions focus on financial targets and managing part-time budgets. The writer was able to witness a number of curriculum middle managers' practices in dealing with curriculum and financial matters. It was evident through such observation that curriculum middle managers practice when dealing with curriculum matters was formed and shaped from their previous teaching and learning experiences. However, there were a wide arrange of practices regarding financial matters. These practices reflected each curriculum middle manager's personal and institutional experience. For example, four middle managers operated their department financial budgets as if it was their own money, yet others operated with a far less robust approach, which resulted in the college Financial Director having to intervene and take charge of their financial budgets.

Exploring this phenomenon through the interview process highlighted a further failure on behalf of the college senior management team. This being, that whilst all curriculum middle managers understood the college's financial constraints, the lack of formal support and training for middle managers on how to manage college budgets was a missed opportunity with potentially deleterious impact.

One interviewee thought that the college Financial Director would support him to fully understand curriculum costing and expenditure.

'I would immensely benefit from spending time with the college Financial Director to fully understand how the college generates income from students, how programmes of study are financed, what overhead costs I need to be aware of and what flexibilities are there when spending my budgets' (CM/T/161).

Furthermore, it was apparent to the researcher that several of the curriculum middle managers saw the college Financial Director being the single critical individual within the whole college who managed the institution. This resulted in curriculum middle managers believing that their success was primarily based on their curriculum department meeting financial targets. Whilst this unofficial approach supported the college's strategic goal of being financially secure and viable, this compromised the level of effort and commitment to address quality matters. For example, a number of tutors would recruit students to satisfy the minimum class size policy and pay little or no attention to the course-entry requirement criteria.

In one particular case, a curriculum middle manager had been praised regularly and at senior management meetings for their area's apparent rise in applications for the forthcoming year. With concerns around increased competition locally, this particular curriculum area was potentially seeing additional groups of five or six cohorts against previous years. The manager in question had of course very little to do with such a rise in applications (apart from ensuring attractive publicity material and robust initial advice and guidance, this particular area had simply enjoyed a surge in application which may disappear the following year).

In any case, other managers with less applications were unfortunately left to feel inferior to their colleague at that the point and certainly fearful in regards to meeting their enrolment targets. Enjoying the admiration of having several additional cohorts in the pipeline, the curriculum middle manager was promised support should such additional numbers actually emerge in September. In being able to relax in the glory of such good fortune, all eyes turned to the other managers and what could be done to increase applications. As the year continued (this was in May of the academic year), the numbers did start to materialise across all areas so that most plans had been met (or thereabouts). In September however, very little had been done to check the viability of the emerging additional cohorts and therefore when the additional six cohorts all did

actually turn up and enrol, the curriculum middle manager in charge, was left to tackle the increase and try to timetable rooms and allocate appropriate teachers.

It was to the surprise of the senior management team that rooms could not in fact be found and indeed staff were already at capacity and therefore agency staff needed to be employed and the new learners had a poor experience finding themselves in different rooms, often too small, each and every week. The curriculum middle manager in question stated that she felt that her line manager had been excited in the potential of impressive growth but overlooked the steps required to ensure that the learners would receive a high quality experience when they arrived at college. This particular incident supports the notion that some managers will follow the trends and desires of the day as expressed from senior or executive teams with little or no challenge. Moreover, their desire to impress can lead to a lack of support and leadership when they themselves are 'handing down' the direction and commands to 'keep on accepting learners onto these courses'.

The curriculum middle managers in this study, who rejected the quality agenda to address poor performance, did so on the grounds that they were overwhelmed with the range of complexity associated with curriculum planning, quality issues and financial challenges. One interviewee stated:

'Senior managers expect me to curriculum plan, address quality issues, attend parent's evenings, attend admissions evenings, complete all documentation requests from the college management information department, put on new courses, visit employers, prepare for external verification visits, manage all staff issues, interviewed new staff and of course teach 10 hours a week also...These demands are unrealistic' (CM/T/147).

These unrelenting demands placed on the curriculum middle managers in this study support the notion that many of the individual's leadership practices were shaped and moulded by the characteristics of the senior management team of the college and the government's further education policy drivers. The

combination of these two critical dimensions was starving curriculum middle managers of the oxygen required to establish their identity in this study.

The college's strategic quality improvement approach centred on curriculum middle managers using their previous teaching and learning experience to drive up standards. The additional pressure on curriculum middle managers to improve student outcomes resulted in a fragmented approach across the college and the lack of a cohesive single college quality improvement plan. Analysing the quality improvement plans during a five-year period highlighted a reoccurring issue in a number of curriculum areas. For example, business, computing, accounting and plumbing courses achieving student success rates significantly below national averages. Teaching and learning observation reports for these curriculum areas also further supported a number of teachers receiving satisfactory lesson observation reports.

The college's inability to develop an institutional quality-enhancing culture and practice supported by senior managers to address poor performance created a sense of coasting. This became manifest in several ways, least of which was a lack of energy, passion and commitment to address curriculum areas which were repeatedly underperforming. The above prevailing culture failed to recognise that a number of curriculum middle managers required support from senior managers and the college human resources team in order to collectively address the lack of performance management culture regarding underperforming teaching staff.

Dedicated cross-college staff development days attempted to address and target quality issues arising from two fundamental quality improvement measures across the college, these being lesson observation reports and student survey outcomes. Curriculum middle managers argued that there was merit with this approach in light of student feedback and general areas of teaching and learning which required to be improved. However, the lack of a bespoke personalised development plan, meeting the needs of each different curriculum team, which

reflected on local issues in addressing poor teaching and lack of sharing of good practice, resulted in many teachers paying lip service to these training initiatives.

This criticism is further supported by John Petty (2012) who argues that too often further education colleges tend to focus on providing staff development activities, which are generic and failed to motivate and engage teaching staff. Furthermore, he criticises heavily the culture within the further education sector of constantly measuring teaching performance without appropriate and relevant intervention processes to support teaching staff that require mentoring to further improve their teaching and learning practice.

In the case study college, some curriculum middle managers felt obliged to support the senior management's approach to use the cross-college staff development days to address underperformance. However, one interviewee questioned the impact of this approach:

'I think that if the college wants to address quality issues it needs to engage classroom teachers in meaningful dialogue to establish the needs and challenges which classroom teachers face...The notion that senior management are best positioned to dictate what is required is nonsense - staff need time to discuss, reflect and share best practice amongst themselves...Empower the teaching staff at the chalk face to lead and deliver staff development activities' (CM/T/201).

The justification of staff development learning which results from a restricted epistemological basis upon which the review of staff learning is a product of a predetermined intended outcome was seen by the curriculum middle managers as inappropriate and having very little impact long-term. Furthermore, this reinforced the top-down culture of management to drive through certain cultures.

6.3 Responses to key literature themes

6.3.1 Curriculum middle managers are key to implement policy change and make changes at shop floor level

Unequivocally in this study, the literature review supports the notion that curriculum middle managers are the critical body in decoding the strategic message from senior managers into practical outcomes (Bennett 1995). However, Briggs (2000) and Earley (1998 p148) argue that middle managers are often coerced in the decision-making processes and therefore have very little input in shared decision-making. This criticism is well rooted in this case study college. For example, the college senior management team were often preoccupied with the financial challenges the college was experiencing and therefore, the emphasis on addressing a number of issues such as underperforming staff and the lack of a coherent focus to improve the student experience resulted in a prevalent culture of coasting. The contribution of curriculum middle managers to shared decision-making is a critical process within the further education sector and this is supported by a number of Ofsted inspections who report that in outstanding colleges:

‘Leaders and middle managers have a clear understanding of strategic goals and a shared vision to improve the student outcomes.... managers have direct responsibility for standards and for learner’s achievement’ (Ofsted, 2016).

Ofsted’s findings further support the argument that within the education institution, it is imperative that at all levels, communication of strategic goals and areas of improvement are fully understood. The lack of this approach resulted in the case study college failing to address the coasting culture for a long period and the curriculum middle manager’s role was often seen as nothing more than a conduit to share information with teachers on the ground floor. There were no routine feedback opportunities for curriculum middle managers to share their ideas or to influence and shape strategy. The senior management team’s policy of not empowering middle managers but and holding onto decision taking roles, ran counter to Gold’s (1998) perception that middle managers are at the forefront

of knowledge about specific subjects, however, they are often the key influences of quality of learning and teaching. This perception was strongly endorsed by one curriculum middle manager; whose view was a typical one:

‘I’ve heard it said that curriculum or middle managers are the “critical link” or “glue” which bonds organisations together, interfacing (and translating - or indeed buffering) the strategic priorities of SMT with front-line staff...I would agree with this notion that curriculum middle managers have generally “risen from the ranks” and I would suggest that critical to success in that role is the need to maintain an understanding and empathy with the nature and challenges of work “at the coal face” whilst holding a clear vision of the bigger picture (in terms of strategic priorities from above)’ (CM/T169).

One curriculum middle manager highlighted the different philosophical approach of his leadership:

‘Essentially my approach is humanist and hands-on; a key aspect would be the integrity and diligence one brings to the role – rather than managing from a distance or buddying up and demarcating “us and them”, it is more about maintaining mutual respect, building bridges betwixt the two, unpacking and contextualising policy change (no matter how painful) and acting bi-directionally’ (CMT/172).

This view confirms the centrality for curriculum middle managers themselves. Staff in these critical academic roles need to influence the college’s educational strategic goals when seeking to secure quality improvement initiatives. This is critical to ensure a purposeful inclusive and values-driven leadership throughout the institution. The success of this leadership methodology is dependent upon senior managers creating a culture of inclusivity (regardless of role or level) to forge meaningful dialogue with colleagues. This would ensure that curriculum middle managers’ voice and identity is not lost and would serve to embrace creative ideas and solutions from this body of staff. Input would also be critical to help address underperformance or raise standards. This approach supports and demonstrates staff buy-in at all levels within the organisation.

6.3.2 Curriculum middle managers need to be fully embraced within the college management structure to value their contribution more broadly

Curriculum middle managers have a wealth of specialist knowledge and experience developed from working on a daily basis at the 'chalk face'. The importance in embracing and harnessing these important qualities is critical if this group of managers are to be fully integrated within the college management structure. Too often, senior managers view middle managers as trouble-shooters or policy implementers only. From this case study, it has been highlighted that this approach fails to recognise the wealth of expertise within the curriculum middle manager's skill-set, which goes (mainly) unrecognised and results in a missed opportunity to embrace their contribution more broadly. For example, empowering curriculum middle managers to promote staff development activities contiguous with their department's requirements and creating a college culture in which all staff see the function of leadership in every aspect of teaching and learning.

It is difficult to overestimate the genuine concern and frustration felt by curriculum middle managers in light of government policy for the further education sector and the relentless drive to improve quality (whilst government funding reduces annually). The senior management team's dichotomy between the quality agenda and financial viability of the institution resulted in taking the decision to make financial viability of the organisation a top priority. Whilst this judgement appears to be in line with government policies to have financial sustainable further education colleges, it fails to embrace the core fundamental purpose of the educational institution, this being that students receive the best possible education and training which in turn, leads to progression into higher levels of further training or employment. In the case study college, implementing even if not designing the quality movement agenda, was firmly placed at the curriculum middle manager's door. However, the infrastructure to systematically support curriculum middle managers to root out underperformance and raise standards of teaching and learning was not in existence. Curriculum middle managers were

left with an overwhelming feeling of frustration, which is summed up by the following comment:

‘Apparently, Curriculum middle managers have the “hardest job in the college”. Some might say that they have a huge amount of accountability, but little real authority and others might simply point to the fact that this is simply the lot of middle management...genuinely interested to know what being “fully embraced” might look like in reality – fiscal remuneration, the development of fora or platforms for discussion/feedback in conjunction with team briefings, recognition of the diversity/demands of work - or caseloads? In terms of the breadth of curriculum middle manager’s activities (and to paraphrase Star Trek), space is not the final frontier – it’s time’ (CM/T174).

The curriculum middle managers in this case study maintained a view that too often; senior managers were interested in student numbers on programmes and less interested in quality matters. The single quality assurance process, which all curriculum middle managers attended, was the quality summit meeting once per term. At this meeting, all curriculum middle managers would systematically go through each programme of study and highlight their predicted success rates. However, there was no dialogue or discussion to support middle managers to further improve student success rates. It is this practice, which frustrated many curriculum middle managers at the college, supporting the argument that this college’s senior management team were failing to fully embrace the challenges facing curriculum middle managers in securing quality improvements within the institution.

A significant accomplishment of these curriculum middle managers was to achieve the best possible student success rates, whilst at the same time embracing the senior management team’s numerous demands to further increase class sizes to ensure college financial viability. The strong sense of disbelief felt by the curriculum middle managers in this study and the converse lack of understanding of the senior management team provided a sharp counterpoint to their view of working relationships to be developed with teaching staff. For example, on a number of occasions, senior management initiatives were not being fully implemented, when recruiting students; teaching staff who

were interviewing prospective students reflected on their own educational values and the value of education when accepting students on programmes of study and not on prioritising class sizes. This undermined some of the senior management team's strategies and also reflected poorly on the curriculum middle managers. However, the externally imposed performance indicators by government policy and the interpretation of the senior management team clashed with the educational stance of a college being operated in a business framework.

The above practice in the case study college fails to embrace what Rhodes and Brundrett (2010) recommend:

‘Head teachers in schools and Principals in colleges are encouraged increasingly to understand the importance of their role in enhancing the learning experience of students and to seek to ensure that structures and systems to support teaching and learning are created as part of the leadership responsibility and accountability’ (Rhodes and Brundrett 2010 p156).

Furthermore, Rhodes and Brundrett (2010) argue that schools and colleges must create a learning environment which supports teachers to develop the teaching skills because teachers are leaders in the classroom...Middle leaders are important in strategy to develop learning centred leadership in schools and colleges. The critical ingredient for this culture to prevail requires a balance of trust, autonomy, empowerment and personal accountability within academic teams.

6.3.3 Curriculum middle managers are pivotal in addressing quality underperformance

Firstly, the researcher firmly believes that enabled, reflective and effective staff/teams are some of the best most important (and most active) stakeholders in the organisation - and nurturing this group pays huge dividends in maintaining quality. For example, whether this means an early alert (and curriculum middle manager involvement) regarding potential retention problems or an unprompted keenness to explore a new or more appropriate curriculum offer, such

individuals/teams will naturally gate-keep and proactively seek positive resolutions for issues at ground level. However due to heavy workload, prioritisation has to be established at this level.

The pressure in further education means that implementing quality improvement is low on the priority list. The best results are achieved when there is a single improvement needed; not ideal given the amount of change in further education but realistic given the pressures of middle management and that increasing workload and responsibility placed on them. There is a clear lack of support for curriculum middle managers and quality improvement initiatives are frequently simply passed down to be implemented. Theoretically, middle managers are best placed to improve quality and achieve the best results; in practice, the workload is far too great for them to really be effective.

However, the individual personality of the middle manager is sometimes a crucial factor in how successful they are in leading their team. Confidence and experience are important ingredients and the right approach and relationship that is built with the team is vital. The team itself and the dynamics of the team can also influence how successful the curriculum middle manager's leadership skills can become, as well as the autonomy that they have.

None of the curriculum middle managers interviewed had concerns over the pivotal role they have in addressing quality underperformance. These managers welcome external assessment and evaluation on their department and furthermore fully understood the relentless drive to improve student success and the need to operate in an open market culture to recruit sufficient student numbers to ensure the college remains financially viable. The following comment was typical:

‘Perhaps I’m too idealistic, but the role of the curriculum middle manager, in terms of specialist knowledge, understanding of curricular idiosyncrasies and capacity to work “hands-on” in close proximity to/with the front line (and within a mutually-respectful and empathic environment) should engender an ability to address quality/performance issues head-

on, yet supportively – whether this be (for example) individual staff performance, retention problems or low recruitment which may place programmes at risk' (CM/T/193).

In the case study college curriculum middle managers operated within the environment of a coasting college. Too often senior leaders did not have high expectations of middle managers and the failure of some senior leaders to translate rhetoric about the importance of subject leadership into real practice was an issue. In addition, the senior leaders' failure to work with middle managers (in order to promote and support the quality of teaching and learning) further demonstrates and supports Ofsted inspection reports, which grade the quality of teaching and learning as *Requires Improvement*. However, the vast majority of the curriculum middle managers argued that:

'They are absolutely determined to get it right first time and give students the best possible experience in achieving their personal goals...Too often we are not asked to participate in determining policy changes and our wealth of classroom experience and knowledge is disregarded. Our identity as curriculum middle managers only exists with the job title...Our expertise in planning and delivering outstanding teaching and learning is not shared across college' (CM/T/181).

Reflecting on the curriculum middle manager's argument and the lack of senior managers' support to address quality issues leads to a view that, they are two opposing teams of managers repelling which in turn is nullifying efforts of both sets of managers.

Ofsted view middle management leadership to be critical to raise standards of teaching and learning to improve student outcomes. They also recognise the need for senior leaders to set high expectations and support middle managers with effective practice.

6.3.4 Curriculum middle managers are highly competent teachers who require mentoring and dedicated support from cross-college departments

The vast majority of curriculum middle managers are promoted from within the department of the college. The notion that outstanding teachers make good or outstanding middle managers with little or no mentoring or dedicated support is a questionable practice within the further education sector. In this case, study college all curriculum middle managers were internal promotions. Many of these middle managers found themselves in challenging situations in terms of instructing subordinates who had previously been work colleagues. This resulted in some curriculum middle managers decoding the senior management strategies in a more favourable manner for their staff and therefore avoid creating a hostile working environment.

This practice went undetected for a considerable period of time (two years). It was not until senior managers at the case study college realised certain aspects of strategic goals were failing to materialise in all departments. At this point testing the communication lines of understanding with front line staff revealed that a number of critical policy changes had failed to be fully communicated and understood by staff in the classroom.

This resulted in curriculum middle managers being required to attend regular middle manager briefings in order to ensure a single coherent message was being communicated to all staff. In addition, this also highlighted that heads of faculties were failing to review and measure the impact of college new initiatives. Interestingly, this failure at college management level was not seen to be critical - the failure was instead deflected onto the curriculum middle managers' inability to communicate difficult messages. The imposition of operating in a target-driven working environment, with financial challenges at the forefront resulted in curriculum middle managers not being prepared adequately pre-or-post appointment to their role of middle manager.

This resulted in a number of curriculum middle managers retrenching and holding the position that teaching and learning is the key management attribute. In the case study college, the lack of recognition of an internal or external coaching or mentoring programme for middle managers further highlighted the culture prevailing within the institution. The expectation is that curriculum middle managers can address quality issues, financially model curriculum planning, manage budgets, challenge underperforming staff, operate in a target-driven environment, raise standards of teaching and learning in the classroom and implement new policies at the 'chalk face'. This large workload was seen by many middle managers as unrealistic however, a number of curriculum middle managers primarily concentrated on two key facts:

1. Student success; and
2. Recruiting sufficient student numbers.

Therefore, the college's failure to establish training needs analysis of each curriculum middle manager resulted in what Collinson (2007) argues that:

'Not only are middle leaders the senior managers of tomorrow, but they are also strategically important in their current role of managing, leading and implementing organisational change programmes' Collinson (2007).

Collinson further articulates that senior managers need to support a solution focused coaching process, which reflects the organisational self-regulatory model of quality improvement. He further supports the Ofsted notion that main success factor in outstanding colleges is the recognition of the critical role of curriculum middle managers and the strong emphasis in developing these middle managers. This perspective was strongly endorsed by one curriculum middle manager, whose view was a typical one:

'My own grade profile shows over ten years of consistent Outstanding observation results. This hasn't happened by magic or without hard work and maintenance and there is an unspoken pressure (expectation?) that as a manager, I should be at the top of my teaching game. While I don't necessarily feel I require mentoring, the ability (time!?) to regularly approach teaching and learning as a discourse would be most

welcome...Too often I am inundated with mundane administrative and financial tasks which have very little impact'(CM/T/147).

Strategic succession planning within the education sector requires current senior managers to reflect and plan future middle manager development programmes. Whilst the researcher recognises and accepts that there are currently a number of new initiatives to support future curriculum middle managers, this does not however guarantee the further education sector with middle managers who possess the necessary skill sets to embrace future government financial and quality challenges.

6.3.5 Leadership practice of curriculum middle managers will differ to reflect previous experiences of other managers and organisational cultures

In the researcher's experience, curriculum middle managers' leadership practice is dependent on how the senior management operates within the college. The management style of senior managers can affect the amount of responsibility and encouragement that is given to the middle manager to both be confident to work independently and take ideas and innovation forward with their teams.

As a former curriculum middle manager, the researcher has first-hand experience of both senior management styles and has found that within an environment of 'supported autonomy' and encouragement, the confidence to assume a lead role and take ideas forward grew rapidly. Conversely, where a senior manager maintained a very rigid and authoritative approach, it prevents the curriculum middle manager from becoming more independent and leading their teams more effectively, as they are constrained and stifled by this micro-management style. Harsh repercussions from taking decisions and taking risks are less likely to encourage strong leadership, especially where there is a blame culture.

In addition, the researcher has found that organisational structure can be instrumental in how effective the curriculum middle managers are in taking a lead

role in quality improvements. In a top-heavy senior management team there is less opportunity to take the lead in the college, whereas in a flatter structure the opportunity is more likely to be greater. The curriculum middle manager can sometimes be burdened by dealing with the day-to-day, maintaining the quality of teaching and learning, hitting deadlines and maintaining high retention (and ultimately, success rates). Creating opportunities to develop their ability to become strategic is helped by involvement in decision-making and allowing them the freedom to participate in both short and long-term planning. Very often, their workload is high as they are the buffer between the staff below and above them, but they are also held accountable for performance and are directed continually by their line manager.

Another factor to consider is how the college is performing both financially and in terms of the quality agenda. The increasing focus on financial constraints of the college stifles the desire to innovate and improve. Having a good understanding of the curriculum and the importance of the student is vital in the fiscal decision-making process, but very often, curriculum middle managers (who are best informed to make decisions in their specialist areas), are not given the opportunity to lead their teams effectively due to financial and temporal constraints in their busy roles.

For quality, where there is a downward spiral the senior management team are very often wanting to take a tight control and therefore give less flexibility for the middle manager to take a leadership role. The researcher has also found that curriculum middle managers who have a very good track-record in teaching, learning and assessment have themselves very high expectations of their staff in the classroom and the focus on the student experience. They have a strong desire to lead their team and produce very good results; in other words, a correlation between the expectation of staff performance and very good success rates and student experience.

One curriculum middle manager described his leadership is as:

‘Within the current Faculty/Curriculum structures, there exists a wide range of approaches to leadership and management. In the same way in which life experiences shape and form us as individuals, I would posit that leadership practice and behaviours (at any organisational level) is shaped in a similar way – through prior experience (either positive or negative).

For example, my own leadership style is a product of negative (overly didactic/poor school experiences and early teaching experiences as an hourly-paid tutor in organisations with very top-down (micro) management – I have no desire to reproduce either) and positive (the open, fluid, reflective and supportive environment I found on returning to Art college in my early 20’s*, plus subsequent experiences with highly effective , supportive and facilitatory management colleagues). A personal driver for myself is a belief in the transformative power of Art & Design education, the potential for FE to offer “second chances” and highly-positive memories of pre-Incorporation Art college. The challenge of course is reconciling 25-year old formative (positive) experiences with the radically different world we face today’ (CM/T/299).

Another interviewee stated:

‘It depends on the individual. Personally, I have a mix of three very different styles, which reflect the staff I manage. When managing my best staff, they appear to be switched on and off solution orientated and will participate to embrace my thinking and planning to in hands the best possible student outcomes. The middle cohort of teaching staff requires regular and consistent reminders to ensure tasks are completed in and timely manner and are reluctant in participating in any debates. The third batch of staff requires me to demonstrate a micro-manage style of leadership to engage them to embrace college policies and ensure compliance with tasks. These staff can be very difficult to engage with because they are currently disagreeing with the concept of education being a financial business and having to operate within such a framework. My personal leadership practice has been heavily influenced and shaped by my two previous line managers. I think I am getting better at the job with time’ (CM/T/298).

Reflecting on the researcher’s experience, curriculum middle managers’ leadership practice is dependent on the individual. Witnessing all fourteen participants at work fulfilling their role as curriculum middle manager, it is clear there are three very different manager styles within the case study college.

One is an excellent all-rounder; a manager and leader. He/she will pull staff through difficult times and consistently influence the direction and outcomes, which resulted in consistently high performance, even from those who would underperform under different circumstances.

The second is an excellent manager, conscientious down to the individual student and individual budgetary order. Through regular one to one and team meetings they ensure that they are doing all they can to maximise student experience and success. However, in terms of leading from the front, it is an area that needs further development.

The third is a straight leader and is learning how to manage. He/she is the first in on an operational level, the first in front of students, parents and staff. From a management perspective however there is still a way to go to learn how to best leverage results from different personalities.

Theoretically, an all-round approach from the curriculum middle manager (which can balance leadership practice and manage staff to collectively operate as one team to achieve the best outcomes) is critical in the current further education landscape.

The researcher has spent a considerable amount of time with curriculum middle managers over a period of approximately twelve years with the vast majority of time in regards to the implementation of quality improvements and situational management. There have also been many instances where, in particular, heads of departments directly deal with members of delivery staff to help support improvements, (particularly when the outcome of has a significant strategic importance). Other senior managers (often in terms of support functions) frequently place a burden upon curriculum middle managers. Quality and reporting processes are most often than not delegated back to the middle manager. If such functions are truly to support the most burdened areas, then more operational support is needed rather than generate an operational burden.

There are too many distractions devolving from functions that are not working well in terms of support and instead are simply passed onto the curriculum middle managers for them to address. For example, bureaucracy and administration associated to the Condition of Funding report. Whilst this is a simple administrative task which college support teams should manage and follow-up, the college is persistent in constantly harassing curriculum middle managers to follow up students who have failed to provide information regarding their English and Maths qualification upon entry. In some cases, curriculum middle managers have been asked for the same information three or four times. This is frustrating and demoralising and simply results in increased administration.

Of course, more administration results in less leadership opportunities and decreased operational involvement, a crucial element of leadership. The curriculum middle managers are pivotal in the running of the college and the largest body of individuals to influence and shape changes to improve the student experience. Unfortunately, they are all too often buried in administration.

6.3.6 Curriculum middle managers have to distil the difference between leadership and management activities

Curriculum middle managers very often find themselves having to demonstrate leadership skills and management skills. It is well documented that there are two contrasting academic viewpoints.

1. Leadership skills are significantly different to management skills and therefore do not overlap.
2. Leadership and management skills are intertwined and require individuals to have both sets of skills to lead and manage a team.

It is this latter viewpoint that curriculum middle managers find themselves having to embrace.

Five of the curriculum middle managers commented that a degree of overlap existed between leadership and management. One stated that 'it makes sense if the manager and the leader are the same person'. Another observed that 'there is a lot of cross-pollination between leadership and management'. These observations reflect Kotter's (1990) view of overlap, rather than Zaleznic's (1992) belief that leaders and managers are different people. Despite this recognition of overlap, the curriculum middle managers were able to draw clear distinctions between leadership and management.

This underlines the importance attributed by the interviewees regarding the processes of leadership and management. The leadership descriptors are those that would normally be associated with transformational leadership, whereas management was described in more transactional terms (Bass 1985). Curriculum middle managers distinguished between strategic leadership, with its focus on the long-term and the big picture, and the short-term more detailed focus of management. Several responses highlighted links between leadership and the implementation of change, whereas management was perceived to be concerned with establishing and operating systems and procedures. There is a remarkable degree of correlation between these findings and Storey's (2004) summary of the leadership-management dichotomy.

The majority of curriculum middle managers referred to a range of positive characteristics that they associated with leaders, but no one contrasted these with managerial characteristics. This would seem to indicate that leadership attributes are considered as 'over and above' what is required for the purpose of management, suggesting that leadership was viewed as a higher calling than management (O'Connell 2005).

The exploration of leadership and management did not feature very strongly in the responses from curriculum middle managers. They were only mentioned by three interviewees, in each case associated with management, not leadership. This reinforces the association of leadership with the loftier ideals of strategy,

vision, inspiration and change, rather than achieving measurable, pragmatic outcomes (Kotter 1990).

The results from these opening questions demonstrated that some of the curriculum middle managers possessed clear views of leadership, and were able to draw a range of comparisons with management. Although several of the curriculum middle managers acknowledged a degree of overlap between the two related concepts, the results in Table III above show only minimal overlap.

Curriculum middle managers welcomed the opportunity to manage teachers and assessors with regards to the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. This was seen by curriculum middle managers as a key role in which they are able to demonstrated their outstanding qualities of raising standards of teaching and learning in the classroom. The college appraisal process was seen a key vehicle in addressing poor teaching in the classroom.

One interviewee commented:

‘This is a perfectly reasonable process to take place which needs to embrace the teachers’ performance in the classroom and identifies areas of further development’ (CM/T/286).

Whilst this process was fully embedded across the case study college, the lack of a performance management process to support the appraisal structure resulted in curriculum middle managers having to work with a limited scope to develop teaching staff. For example, a number of teaching staff across the college failed to improve the lesson observation grade were not formally tackled to address this consistent poor teaching. The senior management team’s failure to triangulate student performance, quality of teaching and learning in the classroom and staff appraisal process outcomes resulted in a fragmented approach being adopted by curriculum middle managers to address poor performance in the classroom.

As previously stated in this case study, the curriculum middle managers' major strength was managing teaching and learning in the classroom. The quality of programmes being delivered reflected subject sector area requirements and prepared students appropriately for their next level of study or employment. In addition, curriculum middle managers used subject specialist knowledge to ensure qualifications reflected employment currency and academic rigour to satisfy the awarding body assessment criteria.

A point of significant tension and difficulty experienced by curriculum middle managers was their ability to articulate the senior manager's points of view to systematically embed new policies. For example, recruiting minimum class group sizes, whilst simultaneously ensuring the right student, on the right programme and with the right support.

The general consensus amongst the interviewees was:

'Students must be recruited with integrity and with the right entry qualifications to ensure the college success rates overall improve...Class size issues are less important' (CM/T/281).

This view did not correlate with the actions of teachers on the front line. Many teachers recruited the minimum class size required and were extremely flexible with student entry requirements. This was evident when analysing the overall college success rates over a period of three consecutive years (2007 -10) in the case study college.

Curriculum middle managers' skills in building relationships between teaching staff and senior managers was limited in light of a lack of engagement on behalf of both parties. Within an academic year there were only three dedicated occurrences at which the whole college in this case study will engage in dialogue to either, listen to the college Principal or to attend a cross-college staff development activity. This is further supported a culture of a top-down leadership and management landscape. Curriculum middle managers reported:

‘Senior managers are not interested in listening to our teams and are constantly burdening us with more administrative tasks’ (CM/T/281).

This divide in this case study college appears to be a deep rooted epidemic which supports the college at best achieving a *Good* grade at Ofsted inspections but fails to recognise the significant changes it needs to make if it is to commence a journey in achieving the highest possible outcome of outstanding at the next Ofsted inspection.

Curriculum middle managers are highly supportive of the notion of applying leadership as well as management skills in managing their curriculum departments, and recognised the need to achieve the best possible student outcomes within the culture at the case study college.

There was a widely shared view amongst curriculum middle managers, as one put it:

‘I recall once reading an article or essay which said something like; “The role of a manager is to organise, plan and coordinate, whereas a leader will inspire and motivate” – as if there was a sharp mechanistic distinction between the two. I would suggest that the two are actually highly interdependent – particularly within an enabling culture which prioritises shared accountability this and trust’ (CM/T/270).

The position held by curriculum middle managers regarding leadership and management activities being fundamentally linked is supported by Burke (1986 p68) who argues the point that while there is a difference between leadership and management the two roles are intrinsically linked to achieve organisational goals. For example, in the case study college when curriculum middle managers are involved in influencing individuals or groups of employees to meet its goals, they are operating under leadership and when leaders are involved in aspects such as planning organising and staffing or controlling they are operating within management.

6.3.7 External stakeholders view leadership being the critical component to address poor quality performance

Further education colleges' leadership is scrutinised on behalf of the government by Ofsted inspectors during an inspection process. The leadership teams within the education sector are now relentlessly scrutinised to test the quality improvement process and the level of senior and middle leaders' understanding of raising the quality of teaching and learning and assessment in the classroom (resulting in students leaving further education colleges with meaningful qualifications leading to higher levels of training or employment).

Over the last three years (2012-15), Ofsted inspection reports continue to highlight the lack of senior and middle managers' ability to bring about quality improvements in a timely manner to raise standards of teaching and learning. However, in a small pocket of outstanding colleges, senior leaders and curriculum middle managers are recognised to be instrumental in providing clarity and support mechanisms to consistently address and eradicate. Furthermore, in these colleges Ofsted comment:

'Governors, leaders and managers work relentlessly to ensure that learners and experience outstanding teaching, learning and assessment. Learners enjoy great success because of that ethos of aspiration and the achievement that pervades the college' (Ofsted 2016).

Curriculum middle managers in this case study had a clear understanding of the Ofsted expectation. Curriculum middle managers viewed the Ofsted inspection regime as an opportunity to celebrate and share their department's success. Similarly, there was a general agreement amongst these curriculum middle managers:

'Ofsted grade descriptors are clear about the role of leaders in improving poor performance. From my own perspective, as a leader/manager, you offer both tangible and intangible support and direction to individuals/teams, effective (and targeted) intervention where necessary' (CM/T/277).

Curriculum middle managers were thus engaged in the external stakeholders' measure on behalf of their students, also they recognise that during Ofsted inspection they would play an integral part in demonstrating the colleges quality improvement plan being fully implemented and bringing about tangible improvements. Whilst there was unanimous recognition regarding the above mentioned view, there were however also some middle managers who saw the Ofsted inspection process as a means to lever more physical resources for their departments. This approach is highly contentious and senior managers would robustly challenge this stance.

6.3.8 Communication processes are the foundations which underpin organisational values and cultures

The case study college operated a top-down communication process. There were three key communication processes.

1. The college Principal meets two senior managers on a fortnightly basis to discuss and share key college business. From this, meeting senior managers met with curriculum middle managers to share this information and instruct these managers with tasks to complete.
2. There was a college newsletter, which was sent out to all staff on a monthly basis. The key purpose of this newsletter was to share activities taking place across the college, recognise student success in competitions and welcome new staff.
3. The college Principal's termly briefing. During this briefing, the college Principal would provide information on student retention, attendance and financial position.

Curriculum middle managers valued all three processes. However, this top-down approach failed to recognise the importance of listening to all staff views. The college senior management team had considered an all staff survey to seek views and comments regarding areas of further improvement, support services, being valued, staff training requirements and job satisfaction. However, this was

discarded in light of the potential issues it may raise (and subsequent requirement for the senior management team to actually address any potential issues highlighted). This stance taken by the senior management team further highlights the top-down culture of leadership and management with very limited opportunities for chalk face staff and middle managers to influence or shape policy implementation and change. Furthermore, this approach fails to embrace Coleman and Glover's (2010) argument that educational leaders and managers need to carefully reflect on their communication styles and methods to ensure staff buy-in at all levels of the organisation is achieved.

One curriculum middle manager argued that:

'Effective communication was critical. An important aspect of communication would be the notion of sharing, unpacking and contextualising strategic priorities, receptiveness to bi-directional communication (from all tiers) and involvement/ownership of values which are meaningful to people's roles' (CM/T/268).

The case study college's failure to have an open culture of communication when dealing with issues resulted in the failure to implement change consistently across the organisation.

6.3.9 Curriculum middle managers far too often are not exposed to external market forces and are totally inward facing managers

As previously mentioned in this chapter, curriculum middle managers are internal appointments from teaching positions. The need to establish a training support programme for the newly appointed middle managers is critical. Curriculum middle managers in this case study highlighted the significant lack of strategic and political dimensions circling the further education sector. Too often, middle managers were overwhelmed with the day-to-day operational matters and fire-fighting issues at the chalk face of the business. One curriculum middle manager articulated a view, which was supported generally by other managers:

'Whilst I understand the need to operate efficiently, with less teaching hours...What is the government funding framework?' (CM/T/244).

Another curriculum middle manager questioned:

‘Why doesn’t the college allow the curriculum middle managers the autonomy to plan curriculum delivery hours reflecting the level of programme of study?’ (CM/T/242).

A further curriculum middle manager questioned:

‘How much staff development budget is set aside for curriculum middle managers to upskill their knowledge base regarding all the curriculum assessment changes being introduced? It is critical for me to understand how these curriculum assessment changes will impact on my department’ (CM/T/241).

However, curriculum middle managers agreed that – understanding the wider political/socio-economic climate (including the potential impact of EBacc/STEM) is critical in terms of socially and economically productive further education sector.

Also, all teaching staff are vocational specialists and many are practitioners in their specialist fields. Therefore, the external exposure to industries ensured a distinct currency within their teaching practice and approaches to strategic/curricular decision-making. However, this was not the case with curriculum middle managers in light of heavy workload and the constant burden of administrative tasks. Some middle managers felt that they were failing to keep abreast of industrial changes within their specialist subject area and that this may compromise their role as the curriculum middle manager in future years. In the case study college, all curriculum middle managers were expected to teach thirteen hours per week for thirty-six weeks.

Several curriculum middle managers typically expressed this position in terms of their personal currency in the classroom:

‘To ensure all my students are receiving the best possible teaching and learning experience I need to prioritise myself to make arrangements in the summer to spend some time in industry to fully understand some of the new practices being developed in my subject area’ (CM/T/240).

This was particularly prevalent in the construction, engineering, computing and accountancy subject areas in light of technological changes being embraced in the workplace.

6.3.10 Curriculum middle managers operate in a distributed leadership framework

The notion of a distributed leadership framework proposes the concept that all staff within the organisation play a leadership role. This idea is a growing phenomenon in the education sector. This model of distributed leadership is prevalent within the further education sector in the light of curriculum middle managers and teachers in the classroom, all participating, in some aspect of leadership.

The interview process progressed from a general line of enquiry to a specific exploration of leadership as it existed and operated within the college. Curriculum middle managers were asked about their characteristics (for example, traits, attributes, skills and competencies) that helped them to be effective leaders. The table below provides some of the key responses.

Table 5: Leadership characteristics, which enable leadership effectiveness

LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS WHICH ENABLE LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS
<p>Communication Skills</p> <p>'A good listener'</p> <p>'Communicative and articulate'</p> <p>'Communication skills are very important'.</p>
<p>Interpersonal Skills</p> <p>'I interact well with people'</p> <p>'The ability to deal with people'</p> <p>'A personal approach'</p> <p>'People skills are the most important – I naturally get on well with people'</p> <p>'You need excellent interpersonal skills, without these a leader would be totally ineffective.'</p>
<p>Knowledge</p> <p>'I know exactly what everyone should be doing'</p> <p>'A good knowledge of the subject matter and wider global issues'</p> <p>'A good knowledge of the area, a good knowledge of the courses.'</p>
<p>Enthusiasm and Passion</p> <p>'Enthusiasm, which is infectious'</p> <p>'Enthusiasm for the job, the students and the staff'.</p>

Curriculum middle managers in this case study recognised their role in setting clear targets and reflecting on their own practice to establish strengths and weaknesses.

However, the need to listen and persuade and show humility when supporting others was very important from the curriculum middle manager's perspective. Difficult conversations with past friends and fellow teachers was an area all interviewees highlighted as needing further mentoring and support.

Curriculum middle managers were also extremely mindful that their leadership style was being observed by senior managers as well as subordinates, so there was a clear expectation to demonstrate leading from the front. Furthermore, new middle managers were conscious that they had only one chance to make the initial impression. Especially with difficult teaching staff that were divorced from the external fiscal pressures the college had to embrace. Ultimately, curriculum middle managers recognised they were in a results-driven sector.

The emphasis of the college senior management team to empower curriculum middle managers to embed policy change and raise standards of teaching and learning in the classroom was appropriate and relevant for the case study college. However, interviewees highlighted the need for support and mentoring which needs to reflect their starting point as a curriculum middle manager, the exposure to externality in order to fully comprehend and understand curriculum challenges facing the sector.

The critical viewpoint from a curriculum middle manager's perspective is that middle managers feel the weight of accountability, but with little real authority, autonomy. This would indicate that in some cases moving from control to empowerment and beyond is potentially still a challenge in this case study college.

This was best summarised by one curriculum middle manager who stated that:

'I am responsible for all my students succeeding and teaching staff achieving their 828 teaching hours, however, I am told how many students I must recruit each year and a number of my poor teaching staff constantly pay little or no attention to my instructions. I have a long way to go if I'm a true curriculum middle manager who can influence change and shape future thinking at the college' (CM/T/239).

The curriculum middle managers believed that they possessed a large number of characteristics, which helped them to be effective leaders. Of the top ten characteristics, four coincided with Kirkpatrick and Locke's (1991) six traits that differentiated leaders, suggesting that certain traits may be of general importance. Stogdill (1974), however, found that although some traits increased the likelihood of effective leadership, this was not guaranteed.

The difficulty with these findings is that only three of the characteristics (communication skills, interpersonal skills, knowledge) were considered to contribute to effective leadership by a majority of curriculum middle managers. Of the remaining characteristics, over half were unique responses (total of thirty-four). Nevertheless, the curriculum middle managers had no difficulty in recognising the importance of the leader as a person, and were able to describe their own characteristics that they felt helped them to be effective leaders.

The fact that it is notoriously difficult to establish causal links between leadership characteristics and outcomes (Grint 2004) does not minimise the importance of considering the leader as a person.

Curriculum middle managers were also asked whether any of their characteristics could be improved to make them more effective leaders, and how they could achieve an improvement. Only seven characteristics for improvement were identified. One curriculum middle manager stated candidly, 'you're not going to get people to answer this'. Some responded by raising an issue for improvement which they actually considered to be a strength. Others deflected their responses

by discussing contextual issues such as a desire for staff development, or more time to devote to their leadership roles. This response is natural and understandable. Managers and leaders are not encouraged to self-doubt, and learn to present matters in a positive light, especially to their senior managers. Notwithstanding the general reluctance to respond to this question, some curriculum middle managers were more candid, and demonstrated an awareness of personal improvements that could be made to enhance their leadership effectiveness.

All fourteen curriculum middle managers believed that their followers had a positive effect on their leadership effectiveness; ten also identified some negative impacts. However, the results demonstrate that the follower impact was viewed as predominantly favourable, particularly follower competence, supportive behaviours, responsiveness, and team working. There were almost three times as many positive as negative responses (twenty-nine versus ten), and many more positive than negative characteristics were highlighted (seventeen versus five). Several curriculum middle managers made it clear that the majority of their followers displayed positive characteristics whereas only a few displayed negative behaviours or made errors. Curriculum middle managers readily identified the initiatives they were taking to counteract any unhelpful follower influences. This indicates scope for amelioration in leadership effectiveness.

Academics bemoan the lack of emphasis on followers in leadership theories (for example, Lord *et al.* 1999), and these results are insufficient to test Grint's (2005) model of the leader-follower dynamic, which would require further detailed research. Nevertheless, a generally positive picture of followers has emerged, their roles largely perceived to be contributing to leadership effectiveness.

Process was a core element of the curriculum middle managers' understanding of leadership. When defining the phenomenon, nine of the fourteen curriculum middle managers referred to process. This theme also featured strongly in the

comparisons of leadership and management, with almost half the responses on leadership relating to process.

When reflecting on leadership as a process, curriculum middle managers emphasised their communication with followers, their ability to persuade and 'win over' staff, and also their supportive approach. These findings correlate well with the two principal leadership characteristics identified earlier: communication and interpersonal skills. This shows consistency in the findings and also demonstrates the link between leadership characteristics and the process of leadership: the latter flowing from the former.

A key aspect of the academic debate on the process of leadership hinges on comparisons drawn between transactional and transformational leadership (for example, Burns 1978). The above results show that the processes adopted by the curriculum middle managers were not transactional. None of the curriculum middle managers mentioned the use of contingent reward or punishment (Bass 1985, Bass & Avolio 1990). They are not in fact in a position to deliver contingent rewards. The processes the middle managers described are more closely related to transformational leadership (for example, Yukl 2006, Leithwood *et al.* 1999). The leadership processes they adopted flowed from their personal characteristics such as enthusiasm, passion, confidence, determination, charisma, empathy and the ability to motivate and inspire - all traits associated with transformational leadership.

The curriculum middle managers regarded their delivery of leadership as overwhelmingly positive. Curriculum middle managers were either reluctant and/or unable to recognise potential improvements to the way in which they exercised their leadership roles. Responses were offered, but reflected concerns with organisational context, possibly to deflect attention from personal shortcomings. This reluctance to be self-critical may make it difficult to achieve improvements in the process of leadership.

The curriculum middle managers held a very positive view of the impact of the college's organisational structure on their leadership effectiveness. They did not however, restrict their thinking to technical structural issues, but also reflected on underlying people and cultural themes. The majority of curriculum middle managers (nine out of fourteen) found the structure supportive, making a key contribution to leadership effectiveness. They cited in particular the availability of advice, guidance and assistance. The flatness and clarity of the organisational structure were also positively viewed by a significant number of curriculum middle managers. There was little dissent from this generally positive view.

The context of leadership involves far more than organisational structure, and curriculum middle managers responded readily to questioning on how the wider college context impacted on their leadership effectiveness. Curriculum middle managers were asked to select three things they would like to change to improve their leadership effectiveness, starting with the most important issue. The responses were weighted by allocating three points to the most important issue, two to the second most important, and one for the least important. Nearly all the answers concerned contextual issues.

Less than half the curriculum middle managers (five out of fourteen) included the idea of the results or outcomes of leadership in their definitions. However, they found no difficulty in sharing their thoughts about the positive results emanating from their leadership, and outcomes with which they were less than satisfied.

Grint (2004) observed that successful leadership is dependent on positive results. He also pointed out that the relationship between leadership and its results are far from simple, hence the importance of corroborating the curriculum middle managers' claims of success.

The principal measure of leadership effectiveness adopted by the curriculum middle managers was positive staff-related outcomes, a measure also adopted by many academics (for example, Day *et al.* 2001, Hughes *et al.* 2002). Almost

two thirds (eighteen out of twenty-nine) of the positive outcomes of leadership related to staffing issues such as good staff morale, motivation, and team working. These findings are corroborated by an Investors in People Report (2004 p5) which stated that 'most staff demonstrated high morale, good job satisfaction, and a very positive feeling towards their career and employment within the college'.

The college's principal objective is to generate good results for its students, and the majority of the curriculum middle managers (seven out of fourteen) identified favourable student-related outcomes arising from their leadership. These included high levels of student retention and achievement, good teaching and learning, and good Ofsted results. This finding is in harmony with Yukl's (2006) observation that leadership effectiveness is usually measured by the organisational unit's success in carrying out its tasks and achieving its goals. The curriculum middle managers were, however, not completely satisfied with their student-related results. Six expressed a desire for further improvements in their students' results. These mixed views of leadership effectiveness are a fair reflection of the college's most recent Ofsted (2006) inspection report, a comprehensive assessment of student-related success. The report was generally '*Good*' with some '*Satisfactory*' results, but no aspect of the college was found to be '*Outstanding*', a very difficult accolade to attain.

6.3.11 Towards a definition of Leadership

Table 6: Leadership themes and sample responses

Leadership Theme	Sample of Responses
Leadership as a Person	The leader is a 'role model, someone with vision', with 'the ability to lead teams', who 'sees things more in the long term'.
Leadership as a Process	'Leadership is about creating culture and ethos, and empowerment'. The leader 'influences and motivates others'.
The Role of the Follower	'Leadership is granted to you by the people under your care'. The leader 'influences group members'.
Leadership as a Result	Leadership 'influences group members towards organisational goals'. It is about 'leading to achieve set goals'.
The Wider Context	The leader 'can look outside the organisation, the context, and bring that back into an organisation'.

Table 8 illustrates the importance that the majority of the curriculum middle managers attributed to the leader as a person. The majority also perceived leadership as a process through which the leader influences followers. Almost half the interviewees linked leadership with desired results, but the context of leadership was almost completely ignored. The definitions selected from the literature (for example, Roach & Behling 1984; Jacobs & Jaques 1990) also stressed the importance of the process of leadership, but were less leader-centric. One curriculum middle manager concurred with Gemmill and Oakley (1997) by suggesting that leadership could have negative connotations, observing that it could be 'dictatorial'.

These initial results give a useful indication of the view of leadership held by the curriculum middle managers. Further light was then shed on their understanding by exploring perceptions of the differences between leadership and management.

One aspect of leadership in context is to consider leadership as a position. When asked to define leadership and compare it to management, none of the curriculum middle managers mentioned leadership as a position, and only one referred to its wider context. However, when questioned about the impact of organisational structure and the wider context on leadership, detailed responses were received.

The first set of findings show the impact of organisational structure on leadership effectiveness, as perceived by the curriculum middle managers.

Curriculum middle managers placed considerable importance on the impact of contextual factors on their effectiveness as leaders. When curriculum middle managers selected issues they would have liked to change in order to improve their effectiveness, an overwhelming majority were contextual issues. This finding reflects Bolman and Deal's (1991 p498) research conclusion that 'traditional notions of the solitary, heroic leader has led us to focus too much on the actors and too little on the stage on which they play their part'. The curriculum middle managers were acutely aware of the importance of their particular 'stage'.

The curriculum middle managers had a very positive view of the college's organisational structure. The only other notable positive feature of the organisational context was open communication, identified by seven of the fourteen curriculum middle managers. The importance of communication has already been highlighted both as a key personal characteristic, enabling effective leadership and an important feature in the process of leadership.

The most negative contextual factor, and indeed the factor considered by the curriculum middle managers to be the single most damaging to leadership effectiveness, was found to be insufficient time to undertake the roles of leader and teacher effectively. This was the view of eleven of the fourteen curriculum middle managers, and for ten of them it was the most important hindrance to effective leadership. Some of the interviewees managed over thirty full-time and part-time staff and they were all responsible for significant numbers of students. Teaching loads varied, but were up to seventeen hours per week, compared to a full teaching load of twenty-three hours. A similar concern was raised about the inadequacy of administrative support, which contributed to the difficulty of balancing the roles of leader and teacher. A number of other important contextual factors were raised including a desire for improved resources for teaching and

learning, staff development in leadership and management, and a reduction in bureaucracy.

The analysis from the data also raises a degree of uncertainty as to whether leadership has been effectively distributed or dispersed to the curriculum middle managers. Many academics regard the distribution of leadership beyond the traditional notion of a single leader as a desirable model (for example, Senge 2000, Ogawa & Bossert 1997). Five of the curriculum middle managers felt they were able to operate with a reasonable degree of autonomy, but four did not agree, and gave examples where they had not been involved in decision-making, or had been undermined by their manager. This unease expressed by several curriculum middle managers, must not be disregarded but should also be evaluated alongside their perceptions of a supportive culture with open communication systems. Such an organisational culture should provide a fertile environment for the development of a shared approach to leadership (Raelin 2003).

6.4 Key themes

In this section, the researcher draws out three critical key themes from this study to provide in-depth analysis and points of observation for current and future senior managers in the further education sector.

6.4.1 How effective are curriculum middle managers as leaders?

The role of the curriculum middle manager is essential within the structure of a college and the curriculum management team could be described as the 'glue' between senior managers and front line delivery activities. As senior managers are required to take strategic roles and responsibilities in the organisation, middle managers ensure that overall, the everyday business of teaching and learning is delivered with quality and gives students the best possible experience. They have a very difficult role as, not only are they expected to have a thorough understanding of operational challenges and detail such as student progress and

achievement, there is now an increasing expectation that they acquire a higher level of business acumen related to curriculum delivery (such as finance and utilisation).

Delivery staff very often look firstly to their curriculum middle manager as a role model and their leader rather than a senior manager; the middle manager is instrumental in developing a positive culture within their individual teams; something so important in achieving effective teamwork and successful outcomes.

Curriculum middle managers have both operational and strategic responsibilities. The day-to-day operational elements of the role require them to exercise a leadership role in order to be effective. In practice, they need excellent organisational skills, an effective understanding of the operational requirements of the department for which they are responsible and a leadership style or a range of leadership styles that are effective with the team that they manage. The challenges are immense as there is a huge amount of firefighting that takes place in order to meet college requirements and to ensure that students have a competent and relevant staff member in front of them for all sessions.

Curriculum middle managers also need to develop an acute understanding of the minutiae relevant to each course or programme of study and to be able to encourage staff to find solutions to the everyday challenges that they face. One of the biggest challenges faced by curriculum middle managers is the frequent change in priorities and directives coming from senior management.

In the researcher's experience, the vast majority of middle managers are extremely competent operationally, each with their own style and approach to the role and their team. However, a lot of middle managers are weaker as leaders when it comes to identifying areas for strategic change and driving forward longer-term strategic agendas for their department. Whether or not this is a long-

term issue for the organisation depends on the background and skill set of the senior management team who have a more-strategic role.

Curriculum middle managers are generally effective at managing their teams, although they are not always as efficient at managing their relationships with the senior management team. There is scope for improved upwards communication with middle managers contributing more to overall curriculum area leadership.

Curriculum middle managers are essential to the maintenance and improvement of quality in terms of success rates, attendance and retention. Quality improvement initiatives have to be operationally driven by middle managers and in many instances, they can also be derived by the middle managers. In the experience of the researcher, middle managers regularly take initiatives to improve the quality within their departments through regular team and 1 to 1 meetings as well as overseeing completion of assessment and internal verification operations.

6.4.2 How can senior managers support curriculum middle managers to improve their leadership practices to secure further quality improvements?

The biggest challenges facing curriculum middle managers relate to an ever-increasing administrative burden that is placed on them and their teams. There are many examples where data is collected and reports are produced by curriculum staff and middle managers in order to be analysed by senior management. The amount of time needed to produce the information is disproportionate to the value of the information obtained.

Far too often senior management is not close enough to the curriculum process and does not take the time to understand the issues, preferring to rely on reports and often coming to incorrect conclusions through a lack of understanding of the real issues. There is a real lack of trust shown by some elements of senior management in regard to the work completed by curriculum areas resulting in an

excessive need for middle management to produce data and reports that take days to produce and minutes to read before discarding. Senior management could support middle management more by trusting them to do their jobs effectively and reducing the administrative workload.

Senior managers have to accept and recognise that middle managers are the masters of their delivery areas and understand the nuances of these when attempting to bring about quality improvements. They will understand what "will and will not" work within their areas and the best method to use to bring about improvement and successful outcomes. Middle managers do accept responsibility for these and are able to inspire staff to go beyond expectations to achieve results. Where positive cultures have been developed, a team will want to work alongside their middle manager to achieve their common goals - again, a poor culture can very much be a barrier to achieving improvements.

Senior managers can support in various ways, but ultimately, the relationship between the middle and senior manager needs to be successful where there is an in-depth understanding of strengths and areas for improvement of the individual. Senior managers can further develop, expose and share strengths of the middle manager by facilitating opportunities for this practice to have a wider impact across college and benefit other middle managers who have yet to develop these strengths/skills (for example, the organisation of Functional Skills).

Where there are areas for improvement, middle managers should be allocated a mentor/buddy, not necessarily from the same area, where shadowing, observation and discussion develops new/better ways of working - there are often very experienced middle managers in the organisation whose skills should be showcased at increased opportunities.

Senior managers should also be open to suggestions from the middle manager of 'different ways of working' - the 'same way' isn't always the 'best way' and viewing a problem from a different perspective can often bring about innovative

solutions. Giving the middle managers increased autonomy for their areas ensures they approach problems realistically and accept responsibility for outcomes achieved.

6.4.3 What are the fundamental barriers facing curriculum middle managers to improve their leadership practice?

Curriculum middle managers achieve their position in a range of ways and through many different disciplines however very few receive formal leadership and management training prior to taking on the role. Some have not had the opportunity to study leadership styles and practices whilst others have no theoretical understanding of team dynamics, and motivational theories. Curriculum middle managers are appointed and then told to get on with the job, a period of support and training with refresher courses every few years could genuinely help middle managers and facilitate them becoming better leaders.

In addition to improved training, middle managers face considerable time constraints due to the considerable operational and administrative burdens placed on them. In addition, some middle managers have an extremely wide span of control, managing at least ten and sometimes in excess of twenty subordinates.

Curriculum middle management would be considerably improved if there were junior middle management roles that were formally recognised such as team leaders. This would enable middle managers to focus on managing directly a smaller number of staff and would also boost staff morale and promotional prospects. It would not be necessary to create tiers of management costing a lot of money but there would be the need to review salary bands and remission for management duties. There would be a financial impact, difficult to swallow in the current economic climate; however, there would be the opportunity for tangible improvement to curriculum leadership across the organisation.

It has become evident that the ultimate barrier for middle managers to improve their leadership practice is time, or the lack of time versus the scope of expectations. They are often fully committed to developing their team of individual staff from having a sound understanding of their strengths and areas for improvement, but often neglect their own development. They also have to 'juggle' the operational and strategic 'tug of war'; they have demands from their own team and curriculum areas at the same time as having strategic demands from their individual line manager, senior management team and organisational objectives

For educational development and sustained quality improvement, it is clearly important that curriculum middle managers are supported in adopting a wider perspective and long-term vision, which creates opportunities for improvement but more importantly develops ownership and autonomy for this critical group. Effective strategic plans to move the organisation forward can only really have an impact if they are implemented effectively and brought to fruition via a shared vision and with buy-in from all stakeholders.

Within the framework of institutions, there are individual middle managers who are central to success in these fundamental areas. These people are those who have been able to see things from a wider perspective. However, far too often it appears that these people had been asked to execute plans and meet aims without any ownership or ability to influence those ambitions or have a say in the plans required to achieve them. The commands that originate from higher leadership, developed by people further removed from actual delivery and the detailed awareness of the issues therein, often cascade down to staff so as to appear that their role is to do as asked without question, challenge and with little or no deviation.

Often senior leadership will enable some form of feedback from curriculum middle managers. This may be in the form of email consultation, perhaps even a termly meeting to share ideas, experiences and concerns. Certainly, the middle managers as employees will have the opportunity often to comment during staff

surveys for example. On the surface, therefore it could be argued that curriculum middle managers do in fact have ample opportunity to contribute to ideas and approach which may improve their ownership of strategy as well as improve their job satisfaction.

Whilst such approaches to consultation could help, it is the researcher's experience of educational management, which recognises the flaws in such shallow attempts by the organisation at collaborative approaches to the development of strategic plans. In actual-fact, much of the direction had already been set. Worse of all, many curriculum middle managers come to realise this and morale begins to fall. Staff feedback from college-wide surveys goes often un-addressed with sometimes alarming concerns from staff regarding workloads, job satisfaction and stress levels being responded to via reduced staff rates for gym membership and discount from a preferred bicycle retailer.

One college curriculum middle manager explained that he had recently attempted to adopt strategies that will support significant changes within his department. In adopting the holistic perspective, action points have been developed from an ideological standpoint, and therefore the middle manager in question felt that he had been able to take and invest increased ownership of the actions and could oversee the changes necessary. External factors may well have influenced the need for change, but these only support advancements rather than demand they be carried out in a particular manner. There are of course factors (external and internal), which continue to push autonomy for curriculum middle managers, and these will be included within this work. The need to continue with the college's prescribed planning rituals remains in this case study, moreover the significant challenge for curriculum middle managers to integrate their vision for their department within the measuring framework of college expectations, still remains.

A focus upon the values and beliefs of the curriculum middle manager has resulted in them often making proposals, which it is hoped would lead change in the culture of the department and the way things are done. This opportunity, if it

really existed, would not only be valuable and rewarding, but also extremely useful in creating greater ownership of the challenge and therefore also stronger commitment and an added intelligence from classroom level and from teams who genuinely knew the barriers to learner attainment and how best to overcome them.

New initiatives and developments continue to emerge, which form the conventional and ongoing experience of the Curriculum middle manager working in FE today. For example, qualification reform witnessed a large-scale central government attempt to redefine the structure of qualifications and the way they were being assessed by schools and colleges. Explicit external pressures were not in themselves directly responsible for the new directives, moreover it was those who interpreted how best to implement change who were appearing to utilise curriculum middle managers as powerless go-betweens, without any say in how to respond and adjust effectively from their own point of view and from their own close hand experience of the teacher in the classroom and what they need to do best to support them.

The perceived autonomy that college departments enjoy, can on the surface suggest a potential freedom to conceive new initiatives, and these, as hoped by the curriculum middle managers would, in turn, benefit the learners in many ways and consequently improve retention and achievement. When interviewed on this subject, middle managers state that such autonomy, if granted, would also see additional benefits such as a greater sense of job satisfaction. With college's performance more and more linked to funding, competition in regional recruitment, area review threats of merging, league tables, Ofsted and QAA reports in the public domain etc., it would appear that such autonomy could increase the risk and exposure to failure and/or underperformance. Far better, it would seem to remove all elements of curriculum middle manager 'localism' and instead apply a 'one size fits all' approach to management and leadership.

One curriculum middle manager explained that she had herself presided over significant improvements as a result of top-down management and a centralised approach to leadership and quality assurance. Just as the researcher was alerted to a potential advocate for such approaches, the middle manager in question elaborated by adding further context, in that this was only effective where such techniques were applied to a grade 4 'Inadequate' area, which required such dictatorial and relentless checking, questing and challenging in order to move them, eventually over a two-year period, to self-assess as good grade 2.

The leadership and management style and approach to achieve this stopped working at that point, and the areas in question plateaued at grade 2 for two more years. It was only when a new manager started and adopted a more nuanced approach, placing increased autonomy and therefore increased accountability (ownership) that started to see the performance moving forward once again.

Other curriculum middle managers cited the success of the college, realising excellent inspection results in some areas, did, subsequently place them in a period of lull, whereby surely the approaches and systems, which worked so well back then, ought to simply be rolled over so they work again in the future. The middle managers felt that they were becoming simply a conduit for senior team dictates to be passed down, implemented and then monitored. In that respect many curriculum middle managers felt that their unique skills set and experience were not being utilised and that anyone with a skill in doing exactly what they are told to do and when, would better fulfil the role.

6.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented an analysis and interpretation of the data which has been suggestive of the existence of a top down senior management/leadership management culture, for a group of curriculum middle managers in this case study college. This culture has been characterised by the financial and quality improvement challenges. It has been argued that the financial challenges of the

college have influenced curriculum middle managers' responses to prevalent and policy trends, in a college, which is run by a senior management, team with a strong financial focused culture. It has been suggested that fiscal and quality improvement cultures co-existed in this college, creating and sustaining cross-cutting tensions and contradictions, fuelled by failures in communication. There are many signs - in press reports, Ofsted inspection publications and published research - that the findings noted in this study are not isolated or local phenomena. There are serious implications arising from this study for the further education sector.

The final chapter highlights the potential of this study for contextualising further education curriculum middle managers' practice, and for informing the agenda and theoretical literature, methodology of leadership and management studies.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion and recommendations: understanding the leadership role of curriculum middle managers and its importance in quality improvement practice

7.1 Introduction

This final chapter draws together the key themes and issues raised by research undertaken within the case study college. In addition, it serves to highlight the strategic importance of these findings for senior college managers. This section includes six specific areas that are:

1. Implications for curriculum middle managers in the case study college.
2. Recommendations for senior managers in regards to maximising the performance of curriculum middle managers.
3. Contribution to knowledge.
4. Implications for literature.
5. Limitations of this case study.
6. Suggestions for further research.

When reviewing the experiences of curriculum middle managers, the barriers they faced and how they were able to reflect upon their leadership and management strategies, what became a significant factor in their role was the issue of motivation.

On one hand, it would seem self-evident that to implement strategies designed to increase levels of motivation would serve to enhance effectiveness. However, this study has previously outlined a number of potential barriers to this approach, as discovered in discussion with managers as well as reviewing the overall frequency and impact of top-down management directives within the case study college.

It is therefore important to ask the question, *'What motivates curriculum middle managers towards effectiveness in leading and managing their curriculum areas?'*

The proposals that conclude from this study and serve to underpin any personal and organisational development are directly related to both evidence gathered

from research and also to the relevant theoretical and practical aspects of human resource management. Consequences of reduced motivation are negative for all organisations, managers, team leaders, tutors and of course, end users - the students themselves.

Some curriculum middle managers have had experience of being managed by several different senior managers during their tenure in the case study college. In some instances, it was clear that they were able to report perceived differences in approaches and in other cases, hard evidence was available; of increased team cohesion and performance as a result of senior leadership style and culture. For example, one curriculum middle manager reported:

‘I have had experience of direct line management by two different senior managers across the last three years. The experience has been different in each case not only in terms of the obvious character differences, but more importantly their approaches to team and individual management and leadership’ CM/T/205.

The curriculum middle manager in this case reported that one particular manager was clearly very enthusiastic, explaining that it was easy to tell that they enjoy managing the team and value who they were managing. They appeared proud of the collective effort and were in themselves very motivating as a result. They would want staff to have their say and also allow their team to question certain directives and in some cases they would endeavor to take those concerns back up to the executive team on behalf of their team.

‘We are left with the feeling they are working for us rather than us for them; it makes a huge difference to how we feel. Unfortunately, I have been managed by others who just prefer to give commands and deadlines and expect you get on with it with no questions asked. The underlying threat of performance management seems to be the main tool in their arsenal to motivate us all. It obviously doesn’t work; however, I have noticed that tutors learn to tick the boxes in a superficial manner just to stay in the good books’ CM/T206.

This study then recognises that good practice in leadership and management as well as poor strategies and approaches almost certainly get transferred down the

line, affecting the actual tutors in the classroom and therefore potentially the students.

It appears critical then that for an institution to enjoy demonstrable improvements to leadership and management practice, senior and executive leadership need to fully appreciate precisely how their actions directly impact on curriculum middle managers, tutors and students - and for them then to hold this close to their decision-making process throughout strategic and operational implementation. Some curriculum middle managers interviewed for this study have on occasion expressed feelings of self-doubt and low self-esteem. This research indicates these emotions have had considerable impact on their performance and therefore are potentially damaging to the tutors under their leadership and again, therefore also the students who study under them.

General further education colleges will often conduct an annual questionnaire with all staff. This equates to an attempt to measure job satisfaction and therefore identify areas for improvement. The survey is also aimed at curriculum middle managers who have separate sections, which deal with issues such as work-life balance, time for oneself, time management, workplace bullying and motivation at work.

The results of the survey within the case study college at the time of this research were poor in relation to job satisfaction and below national averages across a number of criteria such as personal influence in the planning and implementation of policy and procedures, work life balance, and so on. Issues associated with poor time management seemed to be directly related to satisfaction levels in the workplace. However, it must firstly be understood and accepted that almost all jobs involve times of stress and anxiety, this being regardless of how well organised the curriculum middle managers may be.

Many of the interviewees reported that they frequently felt they had to take work home, even at weekends. Some mentioned that they had even taken work away

on holiday to make sure they keep on top of expectations and to meet deadlines. Having to work on days when one would usually spend time with family and friends or perhaps simply be relaxing in the garden can clearly lead to increased levels of dissatisfaction and create a growing sense of actual resentment towards the organisation or even a particular senior leader.

Such negative approaches to work appear to be common across the team of curriculum middle managers in the case study college. There was a growing sense of concern whereby they felt that they were becoming no longer motivated to lead or manage - and that they could reach a moment in time where they leave the organisation as a result of reaching a so-called 'breaking point'. For example, one of the curriculum middle managers interviewed was suddenly off work on sick leave, having experienced what was described as a 'breakdown of relationship' with teaching staff. Until this moment, it was suggested the performance of this individual was exemplary, with huge respect from colleagues and students alike. This example is of particular interest - it is critical therefore, that senior leadership does not take performance on face value but instead develops a significant interest in the context for such performance and to the barriers to ensuring that this high performance is actually sustainable.

This study discovered that some curriculum middle managers were convinced, or certainly made to understand, that problems are mostly to do with oneself, linked directly to the individual and the way he or she manages their time effectively. Senior leadership support on this matter also seems to imply that the individual curriculum middle manager alone is responsible for developing strategies to 'get through the day'.

Educational curriculum middle managers appear on occasion to have mixed feelings on this topic, being all-too aware that sometimes, they themselves were to blame for not being able to 'switch-off', whilst also confirming that it surely remained the responsibility of senior leadership to implement strategies which

could directly address documented concerns and to implement actual changes to remedy the situation.

With such concerns across almost all curriculum middle managers in this case study, as well as the poor results from the staff satisfaction survey, ought senior leadership be content to sit back and wait for curriculum middle managers to sort themselves out? Surely, this delay will impact upon the very quality of service they are themselves collectively striving for. Could such a decline in motivation affect overall performance of the organization - or do senior leaders see this as of less importance than the curriculum middle managers clearly did? These points alone coupled with the costs involved in losing staff and re-training, should indicate that motivational factors should be studied and directly addressed by senior managers.

Organisations then, should prioritise actions that help motivate all curriculum middle managers, particularly regarding how critical this particular role is to overall success. These important issues are indeed considered by organisations but what *actual* value is placed upon them - and are these best intentions (explicit or not), in the day-to-day ethos of the college?

7.2 Implications for curriculum middle managers in this case study college and further education

This study at the outset, sought to explore and analyse the role of the curriculum middle manager in a general further education college. The management and leadership aspects of the role and particularly, aspects pertaining to quality improvement practice, was a key objective throughout the study. The context and background of the position of curriculum middle manager and how that role functions within such a college has been fully explored and such reference has been built into the analysis.

The study aimed to both expose and acknowledge where barriers or issues potentially affected the performance of curriculum middle managers. It was

important to establish if barriers were either immovable or extrinsic funding cuts/non-negotiable government directives or if indeed simply placed there as a reaction to such challenges, for example, imposing a particular culture or leadership style, which inadvertently creates barriers itself.

In chapter two, the researcher acknowledges that there is a plethora of current literature which examines the educational middle manager role, however this literature tends to provide a rather broad examination of the role, often lacking knowledge and deep-rooted understanding of the challenges many current curriculum middle managers face and the environments they operate within – particularly at this moment in time. Since Incorporation (1993), one might say that the strapline of further education has been ‘do more, with less’. One might also say that in this current climate of ‘going lean’, there is generally much less, to do more with. The United Kingdom government deficit reduction programme for example, is a key driver for ministers to seek to remove public funding for all but critical services and to create severe reductions, which clearly adds pressure on how college senior managers react and adapt.

The removal of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and the introduction of higher university fees, coupled with a declining Adult budget and so on, is set to further challenge colleges going forward. This section seeks to offer recommendations to those who are charged with the line management and deployment of curriculum middle managers and who may wish to explore how to release their full potential in the role, even in the face of such barriers, in order to increase student satisfaction, retention and therefore success.

The recommendations will retain awareness that such a college must also obviously run as an effective business and achieve financial health in order to sustain business and to grow in an increasingly competitive market. The study has already established that when top-down directives are issued to address, for example, a lack of recruitment or retention, it is not always the case that those issuing such directives fully appreciate the reality of the of the role of curriculum

middle manager or indeed potential damage to the morale and motivation of those individuals when scant attention is afforded to their experience and opinion. In terms of research outcomes, it appeared that curriculum middle managers often concluded they would go ahead and do something because they were told to do it, even though they felt it would fail.

In chapter four and five of this study, curriculum middle managers have unequivocally demonstrated that all too often, they feel undervalued - and that their expertise regarding teaching and learning is rarely utilised by senior managers. There is clear evidence from interviews and reflective accounts that a lack of clear dialogue and consultation when college policies are reviewed and changed is damaging the relationship between senior and middle managers - and importantly, preventing middle managers from realising their full potential in the role.

The personal and professional identity of the curriculum middle manager appears to be compromised and undermined. Furthermore, a lack of mentoring processes and support programmes to develop middle managers often results in many becoming frustrated and struggling to meet deadlines and other key performance indicators.

They feel burdened by work commitments and expectations which they believe are often unrealistic in content, scope or timeframe. This can result in many quality improvement initiatives failing to resolve issues in student retention, achievement and success. The senior management team in the case study college failed to recognise the value and the significant importance of curriculum middle managers' leadership practice in securing effective quality improvement initiatives. Furthermore, the long-established culture of a top-down and non-consultative approach has resulted in the case study college consistently failing to improve student success rates.

As established in this study, the further education sector relies heavily upon curriculum middle managers to provide a conduit between 'chalk face' classroom activity and senior leadership of a further education institution. It is well-documented by both academics and external stakeholders such as Ofsted, that educational institutions which enjoy greater success in student achievement often have senior leaders with a hands-on approach to understanding the challenges and barriers to teaching and learning faced by middle managers and teachers.

The case study college, it can be argued, reflects a wider national picture where further education colleges appear to fail to recognise and value the significance of the role of curriculum middle managers' leadership in raising the standards of teaching and learning and student success. The lack of a sector-wide, recognised developmental programme to offer these future leaders appropriate mentoring and support, exposes the further education sector to further quality improvement failures and a potential decline in student success rates.

For example, 33% of colleges inspected by Ofsted during the academic year 2015-16 resulted in colleges being downgraded in relation to the standards of teaching and learning and the decline in student success rates. Such outcomes demonstrate and conclude that leadership and management of these further education colleges is failing to raise standards of teaching and learning or increase student retention and attainment.

The government's relentless and unwavering approach to raising standards of teaching, learning, and student success rates in further education colleges appears uncompromising. The challenging position in which further education colleges are having to operate is also further exacerbated with the government's many policies to reshape the further education landscape.

For example:

- Area review initiatives to create large further education colleges.

- The post-16 skills plan to limit student choice and target government funds To achieve best value for money in educating and training 16 to 18-year-olds.
- Curriculum assessment reforms to ensure there is parity of esteem between academic and vocational programmes of study.
- The GCSE maths and English challenge of improving all grade D students to the minimum standard of grade C and college funding to be penalised if these cohort of students fail to study maths and English.
- The total redesign of apprenticeship programmes to meet employer needs and charge employers a levy payment to support apprenticeship delivery.
- The continuous review of funding and lagged funding payment methodology.

This is to name but a few examples, but it has resulted in many colleges having to make significant in-year funding savings, which often risk a direct impact on the quality of management and leadership.

Therefore, critically reflecting upon the further education landscape and the findings of this case study college, it is imperative that senior leaders swiftly address their lack of understanding or appreciation of the culture and the prevalent environment within which curriculum middle managers have to operate. This then represents a significant challenge for college senior managers and policymakers in terms of rethinking their strategies in order to embrace and fully value the contribution that curriculum middle managers make through their leadership role in raising standards of teaching and learning and learner attainment.

This will then provide a platform for sustainable improvement and an infrastructure for the case study college (and therefore potentially for the further education sector) to reverse the trend of negative outcomes from Ofsted

inspections and aim for long-term improvements in student retention, satisfaction and success.

7.3 Recommendations for senior managers in regards to maximising the performance of curriculum middle managers.

College senior managers are responsible for all appointments of part-time and full-time academic and non-academic staff including curriculum middle managers in further education colleges. Curriculum middle managers' appointments are a significant investment by the college – their role is to lead and manage a group of teaching staff to provide the best possible teaching and learning experience and to achieve the highest student success rates. This case study has highlighted a number of issues for senior managers to consider before (and after) the appointment of curriculum middle managers. These being:

7.3.1 How effective are curriculum middle managers as leaders?

The role of curriculum middle managers is most commonly, after the generic role of a tutor, the first tier of management within a further education college and as such, their role is clearly fundamental to the effective operation of the organisation. Their role acts as conduit for the messages from governors and senior managers, whilst simultaneously holding operational responsibility for the delivery of an organisation's primary outcomes and performance. Such performance is key for success and survival in an ever-competitive market and therefore there is nothing as important to any member regardless of level or role. It is not possible or even necessarily desirable to categorise or stereotype all curriculum middle managers as effective or ineffective.

Naturally, there is a spectrum both within an organisation and across different colleges from the highest to the lowest performers. Each will work in a different context, within different sectors and with a wide range of stakeholders. Some will work predominantly with employer responsive provision others purely classroom-based or with higher education. Some will be coping with commercial activity - but in each case, they will have been set both recruitment targets and success

rate targets. Ultimately, they will be judged against these two key factors whilst also checking that they have managed this within ever-decreasing budget constraints and whilst offering back around 50% contribution overall each year to the organization.

The skills used to inform a highly effective classroom teacher are clearly then not always readily transferable to management and leadership of the curriculum. There are a number of pertinent factors that influence effectiveness. Not all individuals have the aptitudes and competences to make good leaders. Commonly, curriculum middle managers are expert classroom practitioners who have been promoted to their first managerial position. They have expert, deep and intricate knowledge of their curriculum and often their delivery teams but little experience of the skills required to manage people or secure effective and decisive leadership.

In some cases, the strengths within the classroom could translate into weaknesses when leading and managing. For example, newly promoted middle managers often are unable to disassociate themselves professionally from their previous teaching roles and former teaching colleagues. This can result in manager behavior at times becoming more reminiscent of a union representative, challenging senior managers to uphold the rights and working conditions of former colleague teachers rather than focusing on delivering the key required outputs under their responsibility. Such staff often fail to appreciate the 'bigger picture' of the ever-changing and challenging landscape of government policy (which often can appear at odds with the popular consensus of college experts) and decreasing budgets where a 'more-for-less' culture is forced upon organisations such as further education colleges.

In other cases, transitioning into their first managerial role allows those employees with real management and leadership potential an opportunity to shine as newly appointed leaders. The important point here though is that this seems to be left up to chance. None of the curriculum middle managers

interviewed were able to reference any serious attempt by the college to train or support them as they moved into the role.

A key responsibility of a middle manager is to influence and to manage change, whether it relates to quality improvement or other requirements of the college. As stated, there is no single answer to address and improve their effectiveness in this role, or indeed, a guaranteed recipe from which to create an effective manager. Often, different managers realise equal success using very different personal approaches. Key factors include:

- Whether managers are natural leaders, able to inspire their teams to take action.
- If the manager accepts that change is necessary and concurs with the institutional response. NB. It may be argued that an effective manager would implement such initiatives without question, whereas an ineffective manager may be unduly influenced by their own personal beliefs.
- Whether the initiatives are achievable. If the operating environment is not conducive to making effective change, even a competent middle manager could be rendered impotent. For example, senior managers may be so disassociated with practices on the shop floor leading to ultimately flawed directives issued from above. Similarly, in many under-performing colleges, the whole institutional culture can be preventative when it comes to performance improvement.

The results show that curriculum middle managers perceived that the most significant barrier to effective leadership was insufficient time to undertake their leadership role, due to their teaching responsibilities. Related concerns were also raised about inadequate administrative support. In order to address this, senior management would need to better understand the pressures within the curriculum middle managers' job role with a view, for example, to reducing teaching loads, subject to financial constraints. This analysis should involve

comparisons with other similar colleges, and may also result in redefining job roles in order to lighten workloads.

Several curriculum middle managers questioned whether they were sufficiently autonomous and empowered. There were also some complaints about unnecessary interference by senior managers in the decision-making process, or lack of involvement of curriculum middle managers in the direction of the college. These were in the minority, but nevertheless important concerns because they indicate that leadership may not be sufficiently distributed to middle managers, thus failing to empower them to carry out their leadership effectively. A range of other areas for improvement were identified by curriculum middle managers, including how best to cope with increasingly difficult staffing issues, disappointment with student-related outcomes, and a need for staff development in leadership and management. In addition, the results indicate some unwillingness on the part of the curriculum middle managers to identify personal weaknesses, or areas for self-development. These challenges may not be easily overcome, but their identification provides a sound basis for a leadership and management development programme that should be specifically tailored for the college's curriculum middle managers.

In addition, a number of other issues were raised which may be more difficult to resolve, for example, the bureaucracy of systems, policies and procedures, and a desire for improved resources for teaching and learning. The bureaucracy imposed on colleges of further education is enforced predominantly by statute and from a plethora of government agencies, and is therefore beyond the control of college managers, however senior. The desire to improve resources will always outstrip college finances also largely controlled by government. Management must, however, ensure resources are directed, as far as practicable, to facilitate teaching and learning.

7.3.2 How can senior managers support curriculum middle managers to improve their leadership practices in order to secure further quality improvements?

In military leadership, clearly any top-level directive cannot be questioned. Soldiers and those in the military services are trained not to question directives and rely completely upon their line manager to tell them precisely what to do, how to do it and when. The success of a military team in any operation depends on compliance. In education, there is obviously a very different context. However, this study has discovered that top-down leadership dictates, can, to the average curriculum middle manager, suggest a demand for total compliance, adding pressure *not* to question, even if their experience tells them the initiative is likely to be flawed. It appears critical therefore, that senior managers approach with caution their relationship with middle managers and take on board a more supportive approach, which better values their experience and their input from the outset. It is obvious to all that ultimately, a better and more collegial partnership here will lead to common goals and success - and there are many steps that senior managers can take in order to improve curriculum management leadership practices. Examples include:

- The transition from teacher to curriculum manager represents one of the greatest levels of change between any tiers on the management journey. It is critical therefore, that senior leadership recognises that newly-promoted curriculum managers will be asked to undertake many new tasks for the first time including taking accountability for overall success, budgets, human resources, admissions, planning etc. Senior managers should provide formal and structured professional development where necessary to facilitate up-skilling.
- This training and development should be much more than compliance training such as with Equality and Diversity or Safeguarding and instead offer real opportunity for newly-appointed curriculum middle managers to test their approaches, makes mistakes and learn from such experiences as role play, case study scenarios and expert seminars and so on.

- After the completion of such training and development it should *not* be a given that all curriculum middle managers are ready and capable - and to this end, a programme of mentorship and support should be implemented during the first 12 months in post.
- With the above in mind, senior managers should reflect on whether the role of middle manager should indeed encompass all of the broad range of responsibilities. For example, it may be possible for middle managers to line manage teachers and maintain accountability for outcomes whilst leaving budgetary responsibility and planning in the hands of heads of school.

Senior managers must ensure that any new directives are clearly communicated to help minimise the risk that messages be lost in translation. Most commonly, key initiatives will be debated within a senior management, executive or college management team which benefits from a direct audience with the Principal or senior post holders. The increased volume of middle managers that are expected from a pyramid structure will often mean that directives are communicated second or even third-hand, which hugely increases the potential for mission drift. In some cases, change can meet with resentment or rejection from teaching staff. Poorly performing senior managers may, on occasion, retract their support for change in the event of such responses, which can serve to undermine middle managers in the implementation of transition. It is essential that senior managers consistently support new initiatives. Similarly, it is imperative that senior managers lead by example. This not only promotes the consistency of message and behaviors throughout an organisation but also facilitates the development of curriculum middle managers.

7.3.3 What are the fundamental barriers facing curriculum middle managers to improve their leadership practice?

There are many potential barriers to unlocking the full potential of curriculum middle managers. Examples include:

- The role of curriculum middle manager is one of the most challenging within a college. This in turn translates into time pressure, which restricts the potential for reflection. Often this is compounded within a college operating environment where generous holiday entitlements combined with seasonal closures result in little employed time outside of usual teaching weeks to revisit management practices.
- Colleges are currently operating within the midst of a period of financial restraint, which also exists across the wider public sector. Budgetary challenges can often equate to a restricted opportunity for professional development or may dictate increased teaching responsibilities. It therefore may be the case that remission is under threat, thus resulting in less and less time for management tasks.
- Commonly, a barrier to development as a manager is an inability to disassociate from previous teaching roles; this can translate into a disproportionate focus on operational minutiae and insufficient emphasis on the management component on the role. This can also extend beyond operational tasks to the personal relationships within teams, a component of management that becomes increasingly important the higher the tier of management. If a manager cannot command the respect of teaching colleagues as a manager or is unable or unwilling to implement changes that may be perceived negatively, it is very unlikely that effective management can take place.
- A significant barrier to effective management is created where silo working results in insufficient exposure to the strategic challenges and goals of the organisation. It is important that the drivers for change are universally communicated and accepted in order to facilitate a consistent and coherent response at all levels within a college.

7.4 Contribution to knowledge

Leadership in education is a hotly contested topic. To date, there have been many thousands of studies attempting to establish and define what leadership is and

also explore which leadership practices are the most effective and which should be deployed in order to achieve the best possible student outcomes. There is significant research available for school middle managers and furthermore there are national school middle manager development programmes to support future school leaders of compulsory education.

One may be forgiven for concluding that a clear and concise blueprint for leadership already existed for curriculum middle managers and that it was simply a matter of following this to secure improvements across the college. Sadly, this is not the case and this is borne out in the evidence of a wide range of actual performance across the sector, including further education colleges being rated by Ofsted inadequate or requires improvement (has failed to provide acceptable standards of teaching, has poor facilities, or otherwise) and others who have been forced to merge or have had to allow other institutions to take them over whole-sale, often with the previous management team forced to go.

It would be almost certain that even in these cases, management teams would have been following some type of plan, which they believed, would lead to success and improvement but clearly this was not to be. This point supports the theory that management and leadership may belong to the arts as much as the sciences. Values, relationships, ideas, motivation all playing powerful roles alongside spreadsheets, reports and action plans.

There are famous and esteemed leaders, now authors, who have written significantly respected and popular literature on how to be an effective leader. However, perhaps at the other end of the spectrum, the researcher knows of a highly effective leader who based his entire approach on that of Captain Kirk from Star Trek. This example serves to illustrate the huge diversity possible in reaching an ambition to secure effective leadership. One size most definitely does not fit all. However, there is little research regarding the very specific role of curriculum middle managers' leadership practice in the further education sector. The research to date around curriculum middle managers tends to be generic, which

highlights the general role of a curriculum middle manager without providing a deep-rooted understanding of the current challenges this cohort of managers have to face.

Philips and Pugh (2010) that originality in educational research can be supported through a multiple set of definitions of originality. For example:

- Providing an original technique, observation or result.
- Showing originality in testing someone else's idea or theory.
- Carrying out empirical work that has not been done before.
- Providing a new interpretation of existing evidence/theories.
- Being cross-disciplinary and using different methodologies.
- Looking at areas not previously explored in a particular discipline.

The researcher in this case study argues that whilst there have been educational studies which explore curriculum middle managers' role, such findings only relate to the constant flux of change within the FE sector and is therefore limited as outlined by Simkins and Lumby (2002), Gleeson and Shain (1999), Briggs (2005) and Gleeson and Knights (2008). However, these studies fail to explore some important issues regarding the complexity of middle management roles, and their ability to bring about quality improvements in a climate of change and uncertainty. Their findings tend to focus on the general issues regarding the work and general role of middle management, in particular:

- Academic middle managers being mediators of change (Gleeson and Shain1999).
- The polarisation of values between managers and lecturers (Simkins and Lumby 2002).
- The reluctance of middle managers to become leaders for fear of their own autonomy being eroded (Gleeson and Knights 2008).

The researcher accepts that these studies provide meaningful and relevant findings for the topics they consider, however the literature within the studies does not explore the impact of middle manager's engagement in raising the standards of teaching and learning, leading to student outcomes improving. Therefore, originality to contribution is by providing a new interpretation of existing evidence (Philips and Pugh 2010), as well as supporting and challenging educational theories in a unique and turbulent college setting.

This case study scrutinises the role of curriculum middle managers in the light of change within a performance-focused FE sector. In doing so, the researcher investigates the leadership practice of middle managers as they seek to bring about quality improvements. This study provides information for future policy and practice in the FE sector, suggesting ways in which the effectiveness of college leadership can be enhanced.

This research provides an in-depth understanding of the role of the curriculum middle manager in the case study college and of their experience of having to manage teaching staff with declining financial resources, whilst also attempting to improve student success rates in order to meet Ofsted expectations.

7.5 Implications for literature

This research has highlighted a number of key areas regarding the role of curriculum middle manager, which have previously been largely ignored. These areas however, are critical to the case study college's future quality improvement strategies. In this current climate of take overs and mergers, it could be argued that key areas of concern are directly linked to a further education college's ability to sustain its existence as a business and to offer its workforce any sense of job security.

In the following sections, this case study research supports and acknowledges current theoretical literature. Whilst also identifying gaps which the case study attempts to address:

1. This study agrees with the current literature that curriculum middle managers both in schools and colleges require professional development programmes to further support and develop these individuals to ensure a successful transition is made from being an outstanding teacher into the role of a highly effective curriculum middle manager. However, within the further education sector too often is it assumed that an outstanding teacher will make a good curriculum middle manager. It is also a leap of faith to assume that the study of the principles, theories and models of leadership will in turn therefore develop an effective leader.
2. This study supports the literature that senior management teams within outstanding schools and colleges are intrinsically linked to classroom activities to support a single organisational approach in raising standards of teaching and learning, which result in a student success rates improving. Such leaders never fail to prioritise and value the experience of the student above all and whilst strategic visioning and maximising funding opportunities are critical for business to survive, they understand that the experience of the student must not be relegated amongst the many pressing priorities such teams face each academic year.
3. This study highlights the continuation of a top-down leadership management style that is prevalent in the further education case study college, and fully supports current literature, which highlights the many weaknesses such a dissonant leadership model. The study emphasises the importance of shared, collegial leadership, which takes on board emotions of leaders and followers, promoting a motivational response to decision making, placing the workforce at the heart of those decisions. To summarise, the case study college fails to take account how people feel about working in the case study college, which can account for a significant part of the organisations performance or lack of performance.

4. Curriculum middle managers in schools and colleges undertake a very similar role in managing staff, implementing government policy and being largely responsible for student success. However, within the school compulsory education sector, teachers who are promoted to first tier management roles are supported by a nationally recognised professional development programme. For further education teachers who were promoted to first tier management roles (curriculum middle manager), there are no nationally recognised professional development programmes available. Current literature fails to highlight the significant impact of a lack of a nationally recognised professional development programme for curriculum middle managers, leaving the specific sector of further education largely ignored.
5. Current theoretical literature suggests that curriculum middle managers have followers who require a clear direction of travel but fundamentally, the curriculum middle manager must be empowered to have autonomy to exercise their educational values and contribute informally and formally to the college's strategic vision of quality improvement. This will then result in curriculum middle managers empowering teachers in the classroom to ensure that students experience the best possible teaching and learning outcomes.
6. This study identifies gaps in current literature, which highlights the need to recognise and value the identity of curriculum middle managers teaching and learning experience when implementing quality improvement initiatives. Senior leaders should take time to develop a deeper understanding of the strengths of their team at the same time supporting them through a thorough appreciation of their limitations, as well as their values and what motivates them. The curriculum middle manager's role in college is an essential one and should be recognised and respected as such if the organisation is to ensure government policy is implemented and

the agreed quality assurance measures are owned and shared by all members of the organisation.

All too often, curriculum middle managers are appointed with no training or needs analysis and there is no mentoring programme available to support those critical individuals who are future leaders of further education colleges. Therefore, within this case study college, the senior management team has failed to fully recognise and embrace the challenges facing curriculum middle managers and have continued to operate a top-down communication strategy, which has resulted in a lack of buy-in to the college strategic vision.

7.6 Implications of Researcher as Insider

Apart from the established benefits of participant researcher as previously outlined, there is course particular challenges to overcome associated with the so called, 'baggage' of one's own role and or previous role and the relationships with colleagues involved in the case study. Other dimensions are provided by the time and place of the research and the power relationships within which the researcher and the researched co-exist. The positionality and personal attributes of the participant researcher may be a constraint.

Particular consideration was given to the prominence of the researcher's role within the organisation. The key considerations in this investigation were the nature of work relationships, including the researcher's position (as a senior manager) and colleagues who were curriculum middle managers (as the respondents). The researcher's position in the college as Deputy Principal responsible for delivery and success included the entire responsibility for strategic curriculum planning and the success of students' outcomes. The respondents were not directly managed by the researcher however their immediate line manager was and therefore this needed careful navigation in order not to influence the outcomes. The researcher, as participant researcher, was central

to the findings and outcomes and therefore introducing potential bias to the interpretation. It was critical to establish an environment where respondents would feel free to express their feelings and reflect on personal experiences. Furthermore, a mutual rapport and trust was established around the subject under investigation. The researcher was mindful not to outline any particular personal thesis before or during the semi-structured interviews and neither was there any detailed explanation given as to why the research was being conducted apart from to fulfil the attainment of scholarly activity as linked to a qualification.

In summary, the researcher acknowledges the case studies approach to research as being firmly embedded in the well-established tradition of phenomenographic study. The research endeavours to understand how the case study college presented a certain context for the curriculum middle managers, which is likely to be a different realisation to that of the researcher.

Phenomenographic study places emphasis on this different world-view and therefore links across to the notion that the researcher as an insider is required to be mindful of not only their own subjectivity (voice) within the research, but that also of those taking part in the interviews. There were for example 'voices' to be mindful of within these world-views, in particular how the participants (curriculum middle managers) may see themselves as participants in research as well as practitioners. The organisation itself also represented a voice along with relevant educational policy at the time.

The researcher being uniquely in a position where findings could actually lead to change in the organisation, was acutely aware not to assume the views of those taking part in the research would naturally support the researchers own view of the role of the middle manager and its context, but there again it would also be important not to rule it out completely but to embrace the insider researchers expertise in the college, as a strengthening of awareness from which to make better sense of the research responses and outcomes.

‘Without some degree of reflexivity any research is blind and without purpose’ (Flood 1999:35).

The researcher as an insider was therefore able to better triangulate evidence within the findings, which inform new or evolved questioning. Cohen and Manion (2000) define triangulation as an ‘attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint’ Phenomenography does enable researchers to use their own experiences as data however the application of this returned to the focus of the case study findings rather than a close-quarter review of the differences and variations found from the interviews.

In Reconceptualising rigour: the case for reflexivity, Koch and Harrington (1998) make the case for reflexivity as adding value to the research:

‘We describe reflexivity and appeal to writers to incorporate a reflexive account into their research product by signposting to readers ‘what is going on’ while researching. We contend that researchers bring to the research product, data generated, a range of literature, a positioning of this literature, a positioning of oneself, and moral socio-political contexts. We suggest that reflexive research is characterized by ongoing self-critique and self-appraisal and that the research product can be given shape by the politics of location and positioning’ (Journal of Advance Nursing 1998).

Moreover, Koch and Harrington (1998) state that if the research product is well signposted, ‘the readers will be able to travel easily through the worlds of the participants and makers of the text (the researchers) and decide for themselves whether the text is believable or plausible (our terms for rigour)’.

7.7 Limitations of this study

Choices that were made throughout the course of designing this research brought with them limitations as well as opportunities. Firstly, notwithstanding the advantages that mixed methods of research can benefit from, this approach is not immune from challenges. For example, a mixed methods approach requires

more time and financial resources compared to singular methods. As previously noted in chapter three, the quantitative data was collected from curriculum middle managers across fourteen curriculum subject areas in one further education college. However, the qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted during a prescribed timeline. In addition, for the qualitative element of this case study, the fact that the research topic involves sensitive information, which required the interviewees to reflect on their own leadership qualities, makes participants very cautious about providing detailed in-depth information. As a result, the group of curriculum middle managers interviewed are limited to their own curriculum area and this may reduce the reliability of the qualitative study.

Secondly, this case study shares some common problems with other qualitative research. As noted in chapter three, the methodology literature argues that qualitative research may have potential bias imposed by the researcher in the processes of conducting interviews and analysing data. The researcher in this case study acknowledges that this study is not free from subjectivity, and that experience, background knowledge and position within the case-study college increases subjectivity. To reduce potential bias, the researcher triangulated raw interview data with college documentation and data (such as minutes of the college management team meetings, departmental self-assessment reports and quality improvement plans).

Furthermore, all interview data was carefully transcribed and the transcripts were checked with interviewees to ensure that the collected data represented the interviewees' views accurately. The data was also carefully decoded following a consistent and systematic procedure.

More importantly, this research case study suffers from the problem of generalisation. The findings of this case study are restricted to the case-study college and are difficult to generalise (Yin 2003) to other settings.

It was the author's aim to ensure that some aspects of generalisation were safe to imply and beyond reasonable doubt. Qualitative research demonstrates for

example, that government initiatives and Ofsted reporting are driving an agenda, which is having a clear and common impact upon further education institutions. Such qualitative findings add further insight and understanding to the case study whilst also it could be argued substantiates a degree of generalisation. Therefore, the empirical findings presented in this case study can be seen to provide a secure guide to a deeper understanding of the role of a curriculum middle manager's leadership practice and impact upon quality improvement when operating in a general further education college at the time of writing.

This study was successful in combining academic theory with the results of primary research. The literature review enabled the construction of a sound theoretical foundation for the study. The semi-structured interviews that followed generated rich data, and enabled a suitably in-depth study of leadership in the college context. The main concern with the methodology used was the potential for bias, due to the interviews being undertaken by the college Deputy Principal. This may have contributed to the curriculum middle managers' reluctance to identify personal weaknesses and areas for improvement. However, several interviewees were self-critical, and none hesitated to criticise aspects of the college, indicating a healthy degree of openness and honesty.

The possibility of bias must also be weighed against the advantages conferred by the researcher's sound knowledge of the organisation and its key players. This enabled effective triangulation and encouraged the interviewees' truthfulness. The results show a good fit between secondary research and primary data, and its reliability stood up to robust scrutiny. Given the time constraints and scope of this study, it would be difficult to improve on the methodology. The research strategy and methodology adopted for this research project were found to be fit for purpose.

7.8 Priorities for further research

It would be interesting and worthwhile to undertake an additional study at the college following interventions to improve the leadership effectiveness of curriculum middle managers. Such a longitudinal study would be most useful following shortly after the next Ofsted inspection in around four years' time. This review would be able to ascertain whether leadership effectiveness had improved by dealing with the recommendations that have been identified.

A further and larger research case study of considerable interest would be to carry out studies similar to this one in several other colleges. It would be particularly useful to undertake comparative studies in outstandingly successful colleges and those deemed to be require improvement and inadequate. Such a project could be based on the hypothesis that 'academic leadership at middle management level determines whether colleges of further education succeed or fail'.

In addition, future research needs to also reflect the impact of curriculum middle manager's leadership practice in raising standards of teaching and learning.

Finally, this six-year journey has reinforced a clear message to the researcher that the curriculum middle managers' role must never be taken lightly or for granted. Curriculum middle managers are the cement between senior managers and curriculum teaching staff, therefore, it is imperative that their identity, values and contributions to policy change are reflected upon and embraced when implementing policy change to improve student outcomes.

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APPENDIX A

LETTER TO INTERVIEWEES

Date

Curriculum Middle Managers

Dear (Name)

Case Study: Curriculum Middle Managers Leadership and Quality Improvement Practice

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research project.

As we discussed, I am studying for a doctorate degree in the leadership and management at the University of Worcester. My dissertation subject is a study of leadership and management of College Curriculum Middle Managers.

My intention is to collate information received from all Curriculum Middle Managers when discussing a range of issues on a one-to-one and face-to-face basis. My questions are attached which will enable you to prepare for our meeting. There are no right or wrong responses to any of the questions, and they should be considered at face value.

Each interview will last approximately 1 hour and I will take notes during the meeting. Subject to your agreement, I will also record our discussion so that I may capture the entire interview. I will shortly be in contact to arrange a mutually convenient time to meet at a suitable location.

Please be assured that all of the information collected from you will be in the strictest of confidence, and will only be used for the purposes of my research. A copy of my notes will be available to you as soon as possible, following our interview, for you to review. When writing up my results, I can confirm that all personal information will be anonymous, thus avoiding the possibility of any individual interviewee being identified. I will provide you with a final copy of my report for your information.

It is important to note that my research is not in any respect an evaluation of your performance as a Curriculum Middle Manager and does not constitute an appraisal. I am undertaking this work as a research project and hope to draw some conclusions that may be beneficial as we seek to develop in the future.

Should you have any concerns about the possible conflicts between my job role at the college and this research, or any other concerns for that matter, please do feel free to discuss them with me at any time.

Thank you once again for agreeing to help me with this investigation and I very much look forward to our meeting.

Yours sincerely

Fazal Dad

Encs.

APPENDIX B

SEMI – STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

INTERVIEWEE NAME (ALIAS):	
GENDER:	
YEARS SERVICE:	

Please note that the questions about your leadership should be answered in relation to your role at the College.

- 1) How would you define the term “leadership”? (THEME: A)

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- 2) What is your understanding of the differences between “leadership” and “management”? (THEME: A)

Leadership	Management

--	--

3) What are your characteristics (e.g. traits, attributes, skills, competencies) that help you to be an effective leader? (THEME: A)

--

4) Do you have any characteristics that could be improved to make you a more effective leader? (THEME: A)

How could you achieve this improvement?

Characteristics:	How to improve:

- 5) What is your experience of influencing and shaping change and what was the impact? (THEMES: A,B,C)

- 6) As a curriculum middle manager, how do you reflect on your leadership practice? (THEMES: A,B,C)

- 7) How do you carry out your leadership role to ensure you are an effective leader? (THEMES: A,B)

- 8) Are there any aspects of the way in which you carry out your leadership role that could be improved? (THEMES: B,C)

- 9) What is it about the College's organisational structure that helps you to be an effective leader?) THEMES: B,C)

--

- 10) What is it about the organisational structure that makes you a less effective leader? (THEMES: B,C)

How would you resolve this?	How to resolve:

- 11) What is it about the wider College context (for example: circumstances; College culture; the way things are done; policies; procedures; systems; people; physical environment) that helps you to be an effective leader? (THEME: C)

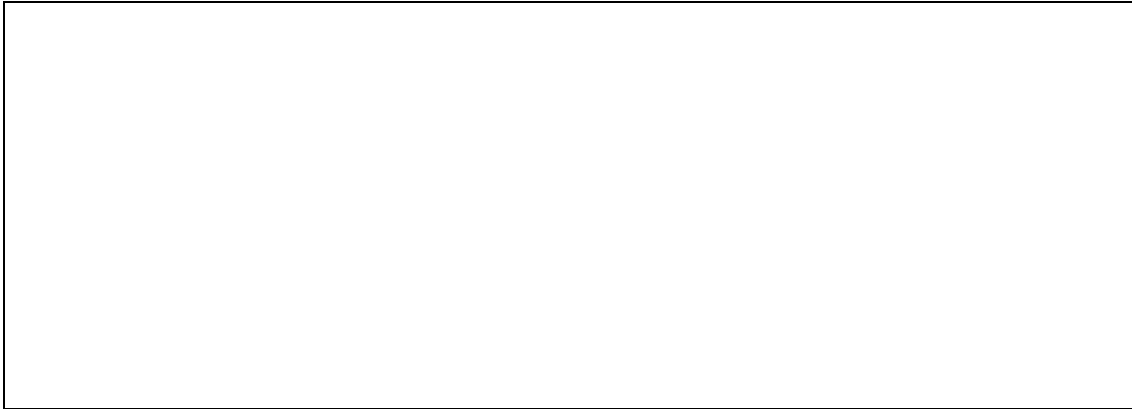
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- 12) What is it about the wider College context (for example, circumstances, College culture, the way things are done, policies, procedures, systems, people, physical environment) that makes you a less effective leader? (THEME: C)

- 13) What are the positive results or outcomes of your leadership? (THEME: A)

- 14) What are the results or outcomes that you are not satisfied with (in areas of work where you exercise leadership)? (THEME: A)

- 15) If you could choose three things that could be changed to improve how effective you are as a leader, what would they be? Please start with the most important issue. (THEMES: A,B,C)



Thank you for participating in this interview.

Date:

Time:

Venue:

APPENDIX C

SEMI – STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE – CANDIDATE D

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

INTERVIEWEE NAME (ALIAS):	D
GENDER:	Male
YEARS SERVICE:	8

- 1) How would you define the term “leadership”? (THEME: A)

In leadership, a leader tends to see things more in the long term – setting goals, and hopes people will follow. A leader leads by example, and is willing to share their knowledge and experience.

- 2) What is your understanding of the differences between “leadership” and “management”? (THEME: A)

Leadership	Management
Good listener, flexible, communicator, very important.	Directs others to follow long-term goals.
Long-term goals others should follow.	Concentrate on what you are trying to achieve, both personnel wise and qualification wise. More of my work is implementing new reforms and procedures as funding changes, so procedures and reforms have to be put into place.
Also have to be a good manager – otherwise leader becomes a dictator.	
Points people in the right direction.	
The leadership and management roles cross over.	
Long-term goals are forever shifting.	
Setting a good example, a good communicator, willing to discuss issues.	

- 3) What are your characteristics (e.g. traits, attributes, skills, competencies) that help you to be an effective leader? (THEME: A)

Good communicator.
Experienced.
Skilled occupationally.
Adaptable.
Good listener.
Reflective.

Practical and down to earth.
 A Team Builder.
 Arbitrator.
 A perfectionist (good or bad).

I am leading a team. They all have different characteristics. I have to enhance those characteristics to lead the team forward. I have to be receptive to lead the different characteristics.

To be able to communicate with them I have to have their respect. My credibility has to be demonstrated because I will often be questioned by those I'm responsible for.

- 4) Do you have any characteristics that could be improved to make you a more effective leader? (THEME: A)

How could you achieve this improvement?

Characteristics:	How to improve:
I don't suffer fools gladly. Maybe I should have a bit more sympathy for the shortcomings of others.	I need diplomacy – sometimes it's best not to say anything.

- 5) What is your experience of influencing and shaping change and what was the impact? (THEMES: A,B,C)

During curriculum planning processes, we agreed a budget, but the Financial Director has already decided on how to spend the College budget in my department. My department brings in more than others and I am bailing out other inefficient departments. I can prove that my department is funded by government at twice the rate of some other curriculum subject areas.

- 6) As a curriculum middle manager, how do you reflect on your leadership practice? (THEMES: A,B,C)

My line manager once a year will discuss what's working or not. I have not received any formal training since my promotion. I'm left alone to get on with it. My appraisal is just an administration exercise nothing comes of it.

- 7) How do you carry out your leadership role to ensure you are an effective leader? (THEMES: A,B)

I use very much a team approach, rather than being a figurehead. I use a team approach for overall decision making and make decisions after consultant.

Explaining and communication, winning over, convincing, persuading and sometimes dissuading – it's part of being an effective leader.

- 8) Are there any aspects of the way in which you carry out your leadership role that could be improved? (THEMES: B,C)

If our system could do it, the role of team leading is a job in itself. I find it difficult to combine teaching and leading. If the role were just leader/management, I could achieve things quicker, more thoroughly and on time.

People say we're better under pressure and we will always have pressure. I do write a things to do list which helps me to get things done as thoroughly as possible before the next pile comes in from senior managers.

- 9) What is it about the College's organisational structure that helps you to be an effective leader?) THEMES: B,C)

In a nutshell, it's the help, support and guidance from senior managers.

- 10) What is it about the organisational structure that makes you a less effective leader? (THEMES: B,C)

How would you resolve this?	How to resolve:
<p>Organisational structure and how it makes you a less effective leader:</p> <p>The role combination of curriculum manager and teacher.</p> <p>The most frustrating thing about the College is duplication of information – e.g. MIS, which is supposed to stand for Management Information Support. We have enquiries from MIS and I go to exams to get the information, and vice versa. We are being asked the same questions by different people e.g. for achievements, exams have got them, so why can't MIS give us the information for self-assessment? Why do I have to look for the data myself? I am not often operation the system. I can do it, but there are more important things to do. We employ others to do data collection. The information for construction is particularly difficult.</p>	<p>Discussions with senior managers, putting your point across about how things could be improved on a day-to-day basis.</p>

- 11) What is it about the wider College context (for example: circumstances; College culture; the way things are done; policies; procedures; systems; people; physical environment) that helps you to be an effective leader? (THEME: C)

Good cross college communication. My views are presented at meetings and I invite others to our meetings, and they readily come, e.g. from IT, LRC departments. People come to our team meetings, there is an openness to come and talk to us.

I haven't thought about any more than what I've already put.

The organisational structure is now quite well defined. One gets use to system.

Communication is ok effective.

- 12) What is it about the wider College context (for example, circumstances, College culture, the way things are done, policies, procedures, systems, people, physical environment) that makes you a less effective leader? (THEME: C)

My teams are sceptics of system changes and are always looking for the underlying reasons for things e.g. change that we are getting so much of. They will question the system and sometimes don't accept new policies readily.

They are naturally questioning possibly because they are involved in traditional skills that may not change much – they like stability.

This makes it a bit more difficult because you have to explain reasons and be convincing about why things have to be as they are. They have to trust my judgements for me to explain the changes.

- 13) What are the positive results or outcomes of your leadership? (THEME: A)

My influence has improved achievement. Recruitment and selection processes have helped decide who comes on a course. I was often suggesting specialist staff for key skills, and this has now been adopted. Specialist staff are more effective for key skills.

My team organisation has improved things. It is a breakthrough that they are all lectures now and not trainers – that pressure came from me – they had wanted to leave. They were teaching far too many hours.

I also needed to identify and address staff shortages in electrical installation. I raised this with senior managers and it has now been resolved.

I have encouraged staff to train. They now get their Cert. Eds. and assessor awards, but not all in 5 minutes. I have encouraged staff to develop and get best out of them.

The message from the top has to get to the bottom. I've been effective in relaying that in a positive way. The College structure has changed, so we are able to do that now.

- 14) What are the results or outcomes that you are not satisfied with (in areas of work where you exercise leadership)? (THEME: A)

Electrical installation and its setup. This area has been neglected and achievements were poor, especially key skills. This has been very frustrating. I wanted to be more aware of assessment and quality processes and build a good rapport with the section, and that then gets through to the students who then achieve. I wasn't satisfied with this area and was lacking information.

- 15) If you could choose three things that could be changed to improve how effective you are as a leader, what would they be? Please start with the most important issue. (THEMES: A,B,C)

The demand of this role to implement new policies and bring about change is fine; it is the lack of time and the plethora of administrative duties, which are demonising the job role.

Time constraints –I work at home and work silly hours here with no breaks or lunch. I cannot sustain it. There is not enough time for the role. Time remission is more important to me than money.

Financial management - outdated practice which does not reflect current challenges we face in the further education sector and a lack of trust in the curriculum middle managers ability to manage money and more importantly very little support from the college to train managers regarding budgetary control measures.

Thank you for participating in this interview.

Date: Thursday 10 October 2013

Time: 11.00am

Venue: Room 343h

APPENDIX D

SEMI – STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE – CANDIDATE L

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

INTERVIEWEE NAME (ALIAS):	L
GENDER:	Female
YEARS SERVICE:	6

Please note that the questions about your leadership should be answered in relation to your role at the College.

- 1) How would you define the term “leadership”? (THEME: A)

I suppose leadership is about ability to lead teams and individuals towards the achievement of the objective(s) of organisation. Leadership is what takes people there.

- 2) What is your understanding of the differences between “leadership” and “management”? (THEME: A)

Leadership	Management
<p>I think leadership to me is often about the bigger picture – the vision, the showing of the way.</p> <p>Leadership is more strategic, with vision and drive, with organisational objectives at the forefront.</p>	<p>Overseeing the the day to day routines of that journey. It’s quite possible that a manager would head a team whereas a leader would lead the managers.</p> <p>Management can tend to get bogged down.</p> <p>Management is more day to day.</p> <p>There is an overlap it is perfectly possible in heading a team to lead a team.</p> <p>Management is about the nitty gritty side.</p>

- 3) What are your characteristics (e.g. traits, attributes, skills, competencies) that help you to be an effective leader? (THEME: A)

<p>Probably some of these I would like to think what I’ve just given you is how I believe I am.</p> <p>For example, passion, enthusiasm, commitment to the college, respect and empathy for followers, calm, focussed, dedicated, professional (respect is a 2 way thing) I am generally positive – have the ability to be reflective and evaluate.</p> <p>Having empathy and being an active listener helps gains followers’ respect and being calm and positive helps gain respect.</p>

Passion and commitment drive me forward I could not be effective without that. Reflective side helps me to keep my feet on the ground.

- 4) Do you have any characteristics that could be improved to make you a more effective leader? (THEME: A)

How could you achieve this improvement?

Characteristics:	How to improve:
<p>Well I do have a high level of patience and tolerance but sometimes it's not as high as I would like – that could be a good things – could be too patient or tolerant – I feel I could improve on that.</p> <p>Time management – I could be more effective in what I do if I had more time on leadership role – I spend 4 days on teaching and 3 days on my team leader role, but there are only 5 days to do the job.</p> <p>I could improve if I had more time or could manage time better although I do think I manage my time effectively.</p> <p>But, given the current levels of power or autonomy I have, I am as effective as I can be.</p>	<p>If you have high standards yourself, you tend to expect high standards of others so could need some recognition that not everyone is perfect. If people need more help, I am very open to provide support mechanisms people need. Perhaps – I don't know. I have high expectations. Sometimes I need to slow down a little.</p> <p>Teaching is not just about the teaching, its organising resources, planning course tutoring, the management of the programme and tutorial and the pastoral element of students. Reducing teaching time would not necessarily take these things away. Maybe I should take the easier option rather than take the most difficult groups (NVQ 1 and apprenticeships). I tend to take the things I wouldn't want to pass on to others – perhaps I need to take the easiest teaching slots and be more selfish instead of taking more difficult aspects of job.</p> <p>We are a large areas, but not many FT staff Perhaps things that would help me be more effective - free up time would be to able to delegate some more of the work.</p> <p>I would be more at ease with the role – but am conscious of my high standards – I have zero tolerance of incompetence. Perhaps I should be a little more forgiving.</p>

- 5) What is your experience of influencing and shaping change and what was the impact? (THEMES: A,B,C)

I get asked by my line manager about new ideas to recruit students and improve student pass rates. I suggest things but nothing ever comes back and I am too busy to follow up - need more time and support from my line manager.

- 6) As a curriculum middle manager, how do you reflect on your leadership practice?
(THEMES: A,B,C)

The success of my department is key. Student pass rate, recruitment targets and operate within my set budgets are the key success measures for my leadership practice.

I don't have an issue with targets but it's the relentless drive from top down with little or no consultation which is the problem.

- 7) How do you carry out your leadership role to ensure you are an effective leader?
(THEMES: A,B)

Purposefully with focus, with vision – I always have my eye on the bigger picture.

A high regard for our policies and procedures and good communication.

Communication – I have an open door style so, unless I'm teaching or about to teach it's unlikely I'll say I can't help you now.

I don't turn people away.

I'm supportive and can empathise with the difficulties of their role – I have been there and am still there, although I am required to undertake a number of roles. I try to simplify things, and adhere to our structures and procedures so people feel comfortable with following those.

It's no good having a vision or policies or procedures people don't have a clue about so have to communicate.

It all rolls into good communication skills.

- 8) Are there any aspects of the way in which you carry out your leadership role that could be improved? (THEMES: B,C)

Delegation. I could or should improve trust for delegation. You tend to want to do things yourself to ensure the job is done (some could do it better than me) but you cannot always rely on people to do it in time. Sometimes it's to do with deadlines.

If the structure stayed the same – e.g. no FT post instead of 0.8 or 0.7 posts, I could (and have done with hairdressing) do all the management and organisation. But recently I have delegated more responsibility to two of my direct reports. In terms of testing my skills of delegation, I have worked in the hairdressing area. This would help me to develop strategies, to learn from achievements I have made from these changes and which areas couldn't be delegated.

For example, with apprentices, my involvement was minimal and when I withdrew from running, the apprentices achievements went down. This is a small but particularly important area of our provision. That is something I haven't delegated as a result of strategy.

- 9) What is it about the College's organisational structure that helps you to be an effective leader? (THEMES: B,C)

A clear purpose and vision. We have a very clear vision, a strong and focussed organisation with clear objectives and I feel very much a part of the objectives and vision – and they're challenging.

We have clearly defined management structures, roles, and responsibilities.

We have some flexibility – our organisational structure is not overly rigid in that there is no room for flexibility – e.g. people are willing to take on other responsibilities or move into other areas of work and the College is willing to allow people to step down from something they're not making a success of.

The organisational structure promotes ownership and that makes me a more effective leader.

- 10) What is it about the organisational structure that makes you a less effective leader? (THEMES: B,C)

How would you resolve this?	How to resolve:
<p>The red tape, the paperwork and administrative requests.</p> <p>Lack of control over some decisions, sometimes it's really frustrating (I recognise the need for finance etc.) but the decision of ALS, that one size fits all decisions, but there is a lack of understanding of needs of different teams. Sometimes the paperwork is not appropriate. What works for one team may not work for another.</p> <p>For example, the ILP's aren't reflective enough of our learners. We need a more proactive record, a more detailed ILP. So I asked for RARPA in addition so we are meeting requirements. We would service our students better.</p> <p>Silly little bureaucratic things – our students are expected to go to enrichment but it doesn't work for our students.</p> <p>Middle managers are given too many roles – we are still teachers and we have that role and a managerial role, reporting to MIS< the Aps and we have external roles, staff, awarding bodies, EVs and IVs. The role is HUGE.</p>	<p>I think the majority of what we produce – it's all there for a reason – I think we could fill a roll of loo paper with all the requirements.</p> <p>If I could reduce the paperwork, I would look at streamlining things wherever possible.</p> <p>This would help me become more of an effective leader in simplifying things to some extent and make it easier to manage.</p> <p>Senior management need to remind themselves every now and again that a lot of what is being imposed on us is grinding us down.</p> <p>Senior managers need to remove barriers to enable us to work more efficiently with teaching staff.</p>

- 11) What is it about the wider College context (for example: circumstances; College culture; the way things are done; policies; procedures; systems; people; physical environment) that helps you to be an effective leader? (THEME: C)

I haven't worked at many other colleges, but compared with other educational institutions – we are friendly and approachable – with almost a community culture, without trying to sound twee.

Our systems, policies, procedures and structure probably don't look all that different to other colleges. I am sure we could look at other colleges who do things differently.

We've made huge leaps forward in quality (whole college effort) and being positive – I think people are generally very positive and in improving the experiences, the students get here.

The Government doesn't value us in FE. We're still the Cinderella scrubbing the floor, our moment of glory is at midnight and then we have to run away. We need more funding for resources. We could do so much better in training people for industry. It's rather short sighted not to have put so much in FE as in other bands of education.

There is a cross college culture of being supportive – e.g. team members of other departments they would give me the time if I needed help.

- 12) What is it about the wider College context (for example, circumstances, College culture, the way things are done, policies, procedures, systems, people, physical environment) that makes you a less effective leader? (THEME: C)

I think (and this is probably rife in FE) that managing 6 teams is not realistic working environment - resources is too much to manage. It is very important to maintain these areas, e.g. cleaning of salons and general maintenance of the areas – it's a waste of hours per week. The time I spend on the work environments – for hygiene, cleanliness, equipment maintenance – some of those issues get in the way of being effective.

The work environments are Holistic therapies, Beauty Therapy, Hairdressing, the restaurant and two kitchens.

There are many issues including the Beauty room and that is before I get onto the Personnel side.

There is Clearview, maintenance requests, increasing numbers of students so we need a quick turnaround of repairs. Some things I have to do are so nonsensical – not an effective use of my time really – a lot of that detracts on my ability to be effective in other areas.

I have spent a lot of time trying to develop a strategy to resolve this. I will have to encourage staff to go directly to Estates. I know staff are busy but I have tried to encourage staff to take more ownership of their working environments.

I argue my corner and bid for budgets and resource monies to maintain level of resources required.

13) What are the positive results or outcomes of your leadership? (THEME: A)

I think obviously the positive results have to be student achievements, customer satisfaction, increase of recruitment, positive perception of how we're seen.

Job satisfaction in team. Feeling of ownership and being valued.

Successful, strong team, committed dedicated professionals.

It's bringing all that together in order to improve our output, which is student achievement, satisfactions, retention recruitment and positive impressions and financial success or at least a reduction of our deficit – a contribution towards that from my areas.

14) What are the results or outcomes that you are not satisfied with (in areas of work where you exercise leadership)? (THEME: A)

Not really. There are little niggling things. I suppose I am a little disappointed with the final numbers on the NVQ 3 in Beauty Therapy because many Level 2 students didn't demonstrate their potential for progression. ~Catering has recruited well – but we are not out of the woods yet – but our reputation for catering is improving. We're doing pretty well especially when compared to 5 years ago.

15) If you could choose three things that could be changed to improve how effective you are as a leader, what would they be? Please start with the most important issue. (THEMES: A,B,C)

a) There are only so many hours in the day, the college needs to decide what my key priorities are. I am currently struggling to keep on top of my job as it is. Everything new seems to be pushed down onto the curriculum middle managers to carry out or lead. I am here late at night just trying to keep my head above the water.

b) Greater autonomy – I think – I do think there is overlap at times with my line manager – autonomy is there and then is not there. I am sometimes left out of the loop of information, which makes it difficult to close of issues sometimes.

Job has increasingly become a reactive one. I would like to be more reactive – its probably the time issue. This is to do with the number of staff I manage (32 appraisals and reviews and that's should the formal side). There is a huge number of PT staff working in my teams and I want to make them feel valued.

Not much I can do about it.

c) Lack of time means I have not engaged in the use of e-Learning and Moodle.

Thank you for participating in this interview.

Date: Tuesday 15 October 2013

Time: 3.00pm

Venue: Room 343h

APPENDIX E

Interview Questions – Coding Framework

Interview Questions	Key Themes		
	A - How effective are curriculum middle managers as leaders?	B - How can senior managers support curriculum middle managers to improve their leadership practice to secure further improvements?	C - What are the fundamental barriers facing curriculum middle managers to improve their leadership practice?
1	x		
2	x		
3	x		
4	x		
5	x	x	x
6	x	x	x
7	x	x	
8		x	x
9		x	x
10		x	x
11			x
12			x
13	x		
14	x		
15	x	x	x