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Deal or no big deal?

Schools responses to the introduction of Teaching and Learning Responsibility allowances

SCHOOL LEADERS | Report

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Introduction

> Organisational cultures reflect and are constrained by the organisation's structures, and in turn structures are influenced by culture. Changing either structure or culture is constrained by the other, but also has consequences for the other. Schools that have taken personalising learning seriously have had to graft onto their existing structures and cultures some new values and norms (culture) as well as different ways of doing things (structure). (Hargreaves 2007: 3)

The introduction of the new teaching and learning responsibility allowances (TLRs) was met by headteachers of all phases with mixed reactions. For many their appearance was an unwelcome diversion as staffing structures were already viewed as essentially effective. For a minority, TLRs were seen as a real moment to raise the debate of accountability, as vehicles for structural change and as a chance to reflect on the delivery of the *Every Child Matters* agenda. Some headteachers viewed TLRs as an unnecessary and inappropriate development, indeed a creation that flew in the face of making a true distinction between developing excellent classroom practitioners and the need to identify and develop potential school leaders at an early stage in their careers.

TLRs are due to be implemented fully by 31 December 2008 and at the time of writing (July 2008) there is as yet little evidence as to whether they have had any impact on the delivery of learning and teaching within schools. They were sold on the basis of being able to create real accountability with a specific focus on and consequent improvement to the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Some schools went for the 'big bang' approach and made changes to their staffing structures immediately from 1 January 2006. Some created a new structure to be implemented fully in September 2006 whereas some have, at the time of this report, not yet used TLRs to any coordinated or significant extent for a variety of political, structural or education reasons. A minority of schools have used the impetus of a new staffing structure to tackle the restructuring of its non-teaching staff, either as a separate entity or as a 'whole-staff' model, which has brought challenges and issues of 'equivalence of role' and equality of training and performance management.

The starting point for the research stemmed from a conversation with a fellow headteacher who asked to look at our school's response to the implementation of a new radical staffing structure. In recognising the potential new benefits of the design, he made a simple reflective comment of whether he had "missed a key opportunity for reform?". If TLRs had the potential for such significant structural reform, why have so many schools adopted a 'non-radical' approach? What were the key issues for schools that took a more creative view? Was the principle of the 'blank sheet of paper planning' based around the need for schools to respond to the five strands/nine gateways structure of personalised learning? Could the principles of the *Every Child Matters* agenda be used to frame a responsive and creative new staffing model? Could TLRs be used to dovetail in significantly with the uplift through the upper pay spine and the introduction of the 'excellent teacher' scheme or advanced skills teacher framework? Where are we with TLRs?

In light of these issues, this report explores the leadership contexts within which some headteachers responded to the instigation of TLRs, reflecting on the potential barriers and creative opportunities available to them. In essence, why is it important to create change and why does innovation give creativity to school structure?

Literature

Potential for change

The introduction of TLRs is the latest of several initiatives undertaken to help rethink and remodel the nature of schools' workforces, to enable them to address the challenges they face in the 21st century and to raise their level of accountability in relation to the key activities of learning and teaching. The modifications to the performance management process and the ongoing national debate about the role of support staff bring the demands for radical change to the forefront of the education agenda. A major feature of each of these initiatives is the increased demands it places on leaders to effectively manage and lead change and to recognise the opportunities to use creativity in their responses to changing the nature and delivery of the education process.

There is much debate and discussion about schools of the future and the necessary transformational and structural changes needed to move the education system forward. A number of common challenges exist in relation to this, and these can be summarised as follows:

- Why is education configured the way it is? What do we take for granted that we might question and change?
- What are the current and future leadership challenges for secondary school leaders? (SSAT 2006: 53)

Importance of vision in establishing a culture for change

This demand for change may be viewed as an exciting time for school leaders with the capacity and educational wisdom to look at the delivery of learning and teaching in a new light. Arguably the capacity leaders have to establish sustainable and creative change has never been more than at present and this is exemplified in much of the current education thinking and research. Many leadership models and training programmes build on the principles of establishing a vision, holding to that vision and then getting others to buy in to the direction created. Part of the challenge for leaders is to see the potential for challenging accepted norms and restructuring historical frameworks.

What could be debated is whether a historical culture of conservatism, conformity and a general aversion to risk in education (or perhaps in stronger terms, a lack of stomach and moral fibre for more radical approaches to change) can now be overturned by the modern and dynamic generation of school leaders. One issue within this is the tension between national policy and schools' ability to develop and support learning creatively. Dalton et al (2001) describe this thus:

> National policies do not enhance capability, nor do they contribute to sustainability – they drain and diminish. Sustainable improvement has to be rooted in schools responding to real needs and able to develop capability. National reforms come and go, but the long-term development of education resides in the creativity of schools.

Dalton et al therefore lay the real drive and impetus for creative change firmly with school leaders.

From this perspective, then, it can be argued that if the opportunities for change offered by TLRs and other initiatives are to be maximised, leaders need to be encouraged to step away from the relative security of conservatism and embrace higher risk strategies. Furthermore, from this view, the failure to adopt more imaginative and radical strategies to change can cause leaders to miss the full potential of such initiatives in relation to personalised learning. Thus conservatism

impacts on both organisational efficiency and the ultimate quality of learning students enjoy.

Some writers express optimism in the potential that school leadership has for using innovation and creativity to build sustainable capacity. Fullan, for instance, notes that:

> The moral imperative in the hands of school leaders with new mandates and more resources is our greatest hope for transforming school systems. It's time for school leadership to come of age. Prodigious accomplishments await! (Fullan 2003: 80)

There is always an understanding that change built on risk can cause disruption to the norm and quite often schools have not historically felt empowered to create uncertainty in one generation of students for the potential benefit for those that follow. The reluctance for this is understandable, of course. However, in the context of driving the modern education agenda forward, it can be argued that this challenge cannot be ignored and recognising the need for change is a critical first step on the path towards school improvement. As Fullan notes:

> First then is the realisation that what is at stake is "reculturing" schools, a deep and more lasting change once it is attained. (Fullan 2001: 147)

However, risk does not necessarily mean that educational opportunity is damaged for current students but rather that the 'tidiness of conformity' will be disrupted. Indeed, many school leaders are only too aware that taking risk is the norm in order to establish modern and sustainable reform.

Balancing change and the demands of the day to day: responses to change

There is clearly a balance to be found between the demands of the day-to-day reactivity of leadership and the need for proactivity in using creative energy and innovativeness to promote positive change. One may reflect that this balance is developed under the shadow of the ongoing constraints of current 'conformist' expectation from government, inspection schedules and perhaps the unchanging perceptions of parents/carers as to the role of headship. However, there is an expectation in the modern context of education for revolution not evolution and hence the need for longer-term strategic thinking.

This tension between short-term objectivity and long-term reform can be seen to create a potential continuum of leadership response. Conflicting tensions may be an underlying reason for leaders not always maximising the opportunity new initiatives offer for sustainable reform. This continuum of responses is noted by writers such as Hargreaves and Fink, who observe:

> Innovations easily attract enthusiasts, but it is harder to convince more sceptical educators to commit to the hard work of implementation. (Hargreaves & Fink 2006: 1)

Figure 1 summarises a potential continuum of responses to change.

Figure 1: Continuum of responses to change

Figure 1 shows that at one extreme individuals exist who conceive their position as one of being the 'victim' of external pressures and demand. Their response may be summarised as:

> See themselves as a victim of events rather than as decision makers. (NCSL 2006: 44)

Thus it is possible to conceive this response as operating with a ‘comfort zone’ of change management (recognising, of course, that working in this way may feel anything other than comfortable). At the other extreme we can identify pioneering reformers who are willing to sacrifice the immediate demands of accountability for a spirit of enterprise and creativity developed through an understanding of the complexity of school leadership. Their response may be summarised as:

> One needs to act differently in different situations or phases of the change process. (Fullan 2001: 147)

Potentially what lies in between these extremes are a range of responses to opportunities for reform that may pragmatically balance comfort with risk, and a short-term solution with long-term sustainable development. What is clear is that TLRs have provided an example of national policy that has the potential to create reform, bring leadership creativity to the fore and inspire a new generation of school leaders at all levels within a learning community.

This study explores the responses of a subset of school leaders to the opportunity for change presented by the introduction of TLRs and in so doing, develops this continuum into a typology of leadership responses to change.

Methodology

The research used a case study approach within six different types of secondary school research was supplemented by professional dialogue with a range of education professionals across all phases and sectors of education to give a contextual background to the early impressions of TLR implementation.

The study aimed to identify the climate and culture of schools leadership through developing a typology of responses centred around questions on the leadership approach to TLR introduction. These discussions allowed leaders to reflect on TLRs within their school's context and to explore the perceptions of the freedom they enjoyed to innovate creatively and/or radically as part of this process.

A semi-structured interview approach supported by a standardised framework for transcription and analysis was adopted. This supported a number of key benefits:

- It allowed for identification and analysis of the key issues.
- If offered a period of reflection for the interviewee.
- It promoted challenge and dialogue in relation to the underlying leadership contexts of their decision making.
- It presented an opportunity to reflect on the wider issues of school leadership particularly in relation to innovation and creativity, using contemporary examples of their work.

The key research focus was based on:

- the degree of freedom that was offered to headteachers in introducing TLRs
- the potential TLRs offered for innovation, creativity and as a lever for institutional change
- the barriers TLRs presented to introducing innovation
- the initial impact from the introduction of TLRs

The schools chosen presented a cross-section of the secondary sector although no discussion was held with academies. Schools selected from Buckinghamshire, East Sussex, Essex, Kent, London and Stoke provided a range of ages (11–16 or 11–18), mixed and single sex, selective and non-selective and varied in number from about 600 to 1,500 students.

Findings

This section begins by providing a brief description of each of the case study schools and the ways in which they responded to the TLR agenda. It then introduces a typology that distils the common characteristics of these approaches, and offers a framework for considering the strategies adopted by other schools while recognising that overly simplistic categorisation may not present the full picture of current restructuring.

School A

This school had taken a radical view of TLRs. The headteacher placed strong emphasis on using the allowances to "engender creativity and accountability" and supported a whole-school drive to focus more on the key issues of learning and teaching. The impetus for creativity was based on the "desire to take a very good school to outstanding", recognising that this is one of the main challenges for many schools across the country.

Structural inventiveness was seen as a key lever in generating significant and sustainable change, challenging complacency and attempting to get staff to "look at education in a different way". In this way it was anticipated that public accountable targets could be easily surpassed by focusing on the raising of individual student potential. The use of terminology to describe new posts was seen as key in creating real cultural change, for example heads of learning (traditionally heads of Year) and historic boundaries of 'departments' of varying sizes were replaced with a range of faculties which incorporated both teachers and support staff in the overall complexity of the structure. TLRs were matched with 'equivalence' for support staff with responsibility and all staff were involved in creating new role specifications and 'leadership and management' profiles based on the school's four main key accountabilities.

Interestingly the structure drew in a number of other initiatives meaning that TLRs were used as agents of whole-school change rather than a simple tool for restructuring staffing. Issues of succession planning, distributive leadership, student voice and personalised learning were seen as the overall beneficiaries of using TLR introduction in a creative way. It was also noted that it created an opportunity to challenge the whole issue of governor involvement in the school in terms of their relationship with key aspects of curriculum provision.

Of the 'risks' discussed there were many interesting and as yet untested concerns in relation to:

- the way that new posts in the school could be advertised externally as 'radicalisation' perhaps could not be conveyed in a coherent way
- the way that staff might not 'buy in to' the new vision, looking for more traditional structures within which to work
- staff taking on the most 'junior' of TLR posts did not feel that their whole-school responsibilities should be more greatly remunerated
- the settling in of a structure may impact on the performance of the current cohort of students

One of the major internal issues is that the new structure was used to challenge the staff classed as 'will nots' as opposed to the 'cannots'. A radical structure was seen as a way of getting staff to be self-reflective in their desire to create a student-centred community. Rather than using TLRs to challenge any under-performance in staff, they were used to create a structure that challenged people's exposure as key

'leaders' at all levels. There had been a significant turnover of some staff that had been consistently resistant to change since the arrival of a new headteacher.

School B

This school showed significant creativity in their use of TLRs as an agent of change. They were seen as a way of "shifting management allowances", although the approach taken was based on using the leadership spine to create restructuring rather than TLRs per se that were used instead to basically 'assimilate' the middle management structure. There was a slimming down of the senior team with a broadening of leadership, while retaining a fairly 'traditional' sub-structure.

What was significant in the process was the opportunity to redefine role specifications, cross-referencing these to national standards. There was recognition that the word 'manager' had to be replaced with the notion of 'leadership at all levels', using TLRs as a mechanism to develop 'distributive leadership'. The opportunity to rethink the role of pastoral staff was key in this process and was also timely because of the current two-year period that the headteacher had been in post – TLRs supported change management.

The headteacher wanted to use the leadership spine as the 'equivalent' to the higher TLR levels, reflecting the tension between accountability and leadership expectation. Traditionally the school had heads of department that were strong managers but not 'leaders'. In many ways TLRs had encouraged innovation with a chance to change attitudes towards 'learning'. The ability to research and develop new ideas was essential to the school and the TLRs allowed for challenges to be made to the detail of job descriptions and the additional responsibilities that could be linked to them. TLRs had allowed the headteacher to "get around an issue" but had also created many surprises in terms of key staff "understanding the message/vision and building their own capacity as leaders very quickly".

The school wished to stay with the notion of heads of Year (on the 'not broke – don't fix' principle) as there was an already strong Year identity, but TLRs allowed for new internal appointments of people already 'buying in' to the new vision. The power of the TLRs was that they were creating teams within teams and despite a fundamentally 'assimilatory' approach, it was creating a better focus on student tracking rather than the more firefighting pastoral approach.

Overall the school had recognised that TLRs were more of an opportunity than a threat. Although there was as yet little evidence of improvements to learning and teaching, the real issue had been on the impact and leadership of 'change management' that was seen by the headteacher as his key role. There had been no real change to the basic school structure but strong work on job specifications meant that the new breed of leaders knew the expectations of their role early on from appointment. Teams were working well and there were some real positive 'surprises' in some people's individual development.

School C

In this pioneering establishment TLRs were seen as offering 'no potential opportunities' because the school had already gone down a completely different route (how the school would then square that with the legal requirement of restructuring was a matter of some conjecture). The basic principles of TLRs were not accepted not only on a philosophical basis but also because the school had already adopted a dichotomous system on professional entry of creating 'potential leaders' as opposed to 'excellent classroom practitioners'. The headteacher believed

that the TLRs simply did not look at the bigger picture, especially as there was no dovetailing of TLRs with progression through the upper pay spine levels.

In this context, TLRs exacerbated the conflict between practitioners versus leaders and they simply did not fit into the school's future development programme, particularly the notion of moving towards academy status. This 'academy' context was the prime motivation for future change, with the school already operating a faculty structure derived through previous innovatory strategies. Although the headteacher recognised that most schools had probably adopted an 'assimilatory' approach to TLRs and that they did have potential for change, schools should ensure they retained a sense of pragmatism, not allowing TLRs to deflect schools into adopting 'simple formulaic modelling'.

The headteacher was passionate about accountability but did not believe that TLRs contributed to a coherent accountability model. TLRs were seen as "a complete anathema", especially as it would be perfectly reasonable to use the already established leadership spine to develop individuals and their consequent accountabilities. TLRs were described as "mixed-message allowances" although their appearance was recognised as an impetus for discussion and as "an instigation in looking for alternative solutions".

It was interesting to note that the school's drive towards the 'two pathway' entry into the profession was already being discussed at a national level, particularly in the context of being highly creative. It is also worth noting that the greatest barrier to change and innovation was seen as the creation of a 'deficit' model approach to leadership as promulgated by the NCSL, but that the national standards should be used much more proactively to create real innovation and radicalisation in schools.

School D

This school talked strongly of the context of 'traditional provision'. TLRs arrived at a time when there was already much curriculum debate and development being undertaken and the increase of the number of 'curriculum areas' was supported by the allowances. In many ways, the appearance of TLRs was seen as a way of re-energising student support, focusing mainly on the provision of pastoral support rather than teaching and learning. The pastoral system had already been internally and externally (through inspection) evaluated as effective and a strength of the school but recognition was given to the potential for the 'quiet majority' of the students to perhaps not be supported as clearly as more readily identifiable groups. The tracking of students was defined as embedded but inconsistent.

There was no major restructuring required although a new assistant headteacher was introduced as systems were recognised as effective within the context of the school. There was a clear assessment that the school approached TLR implementation as an 'assimilation' of their existing structure. This meant that they could move to the introduction of TLRs immediately and at the time of the interview no old-style management allowances remained in the structure. However, TLRs were seen as an opportunity to revisit current job descriptions and did lead to the renaming of roles, for example 'heads of faculty' were retitled as 'curriculum team leaders'.

There was obviously much discussion about the potential for TLRs to effect radical change but as the community clearly viewed the education provision as 'outstanding' there was an implicit fear of radicalisation conflicting with well-established and traditional norms. The leadership dilemma was that the supposition of outstanding could lead to a reality of 'coasting' and the assimilation of the current school 'hierarchy' may have been something that TLRs could have challenged. However,

TLRs were the impetus for involving an external agency (Hay Group) in addressing the issue of job descriptions with all individual staff. The motivation for this was to increase the level of accountability attached to each post – the "racheting" of accountability as it was described. Interestingly, at the end of this section of discussion the headteacher reflected openly on the possibility that an opportunity to be more radical may have been lost, but the culture of the school had to be respected not only because of recent, excellent Ofsted outcomes but also because there was a perception that the school could only develop in "small incremental steps".

Concerns were raised that the introduction of TLRs had been too rapid and did not give more quality time for professional reflection. It was not perceived as a missed opportunity particularly as the school had focused considerable energy on redefining job titles and job descriptions, insisting that the word 'leader' was included in most roles that carried responsibility allowances. Heads of Key Stages emerged with heads of Year being renamed as 'transition coordinators'. As the headteacher stated with great satisfaction, "we were able to abandon the word manager at last". The headteacher felt that TLRs had arrived at a time when the school was focusing significantly on their greatest passion – leadership development – and therefore had been a helpful platform to promote this process.

School E

This school, in quite challenging circumstances, saw the appearance of TLRs as a real opportunity to "break the current structure in the school". It was a chance to dismantle systems, especially the pastoral dimension rather than the academic one. A simultaneous review of SEN (special educational needs) provision supported this process. The perception was that the current school structures were not working and there was a need to take a very pragmatic approach (tinged perhaps with a healthy amount of cynicism) to challenges that the school were facing, particularly as they emerged successfully from special measures. TLRs were a chance to review, to "alter the climate", to look at the "grounds for change" and to build on the anecdotal evidence that was suggesting that aspects of the school were not working.

The opportunity was provided to look at the effectiveness of some staff and to alter the Key Stage structure. There was an underlying need to look at behaviour in terms of promoting academic progress and to establish new so-called 'heads of learning'. Above all TLRs were seen as a "golden opportunity" to look at specific staffing issues and on that basis they were introduced on a formulaic basis. The chance to develop line management was a key underlying principle, as was the opportunity to create new posts within the core subjects and new assistant subject leaders as a way of (indirectly) retaining good staff.

There was an acceptance that perhaps there was an opportunity for even greater creativity, particularly as the establishment of effective line management was such an important issue for the school. There was a sense that the headteacher was constrained by the need to take a more short-term review of restructuring, particularly as there was a necessity to reflect the potential impact on neighbouring schools with whom the school worked very closely. What was clear was that the TLRs had little impact on the current structure of the Senior Leadership Group that was expanded for other whole-school reasons.

TLRs emerged in the school at the beginning of their introduction (January 2006). Consultation on them was smooth and supported by governors and local associations but recognition was given to the context of a very specific and traumatic event at the school that was still resonating within the community – it definitely had an impact on TLR introduction. The school were committed to monitoring staff

morale throughout the process and it was this perhaps that led the school to 'playing safe' in restructuring. One interesting perception was that it was inevitable that appointments to some posts would put younger good staff in charge of far more senior staff with some consequent challenging salary differentials. The school's approach to any potential barriers was to 'play' with staff perceptions while retaining a total transparency in the process.

Assessments on the impact of TLR introduction were clear in the sense that they were already challenging the status quo. They appeared in a way that seemed to create 'few waves' and this gave the senior team a sense that it had been well handled. The creation of newly titled posts had already supported more effective student tracking and this had led to the creation of a new behaviour policy written by many new staff to posts. The reduction in the number of 'Senior Management Team [SMT] call-outs' was clear evidence of progress. The greatest impact seems to have been on the capacity TLRs had to support the redefinition of role specifications, the introduction of the notion of leadership at all levels and the capacity to include 'expectations' of role in all staffing posts.

In final discussions it was interesting to note that the school's promotion of the notion of leaders at all levels was critical for its improvement and yet the headteacher felt that there was an underlying national resistance from the profession itself to value such leadership development. This combined with a resistance to be more creative because of the accountabilities that exist from so many differing and external agencies. It is perhaps these types of constraints that prevented TLRs from having a much more radical impact.

School F

This school responded within the context of possible movement to academy status within a process of local authority reorganisation. Although this did not directly dictate the school's response to TLRs, it had to be borne in mind throughout the discussions. Within the immediacy of the school, TLRs were seen as a way of challenging and indeed removing the 'duality' of some of the roles performed by staff with posts of responsibility. They gave a chance to simplify the rather complex structure that existed based on old management allowances, especially those tasks related to clear 'non-teaching' activities as defined in the workforce remodelling agreement. The capacity to remove clear anomalies was seen as a strength of the reform as was the ability to indicate a potential future structure, particularly as the school was not going to introduce TLRs until the last minute, that is, 31 December 2008.

This 'delay' in implementation was seen as a healthy response by the school for two major reasons. Firstly, there were strong contextual issues in relation to some professional associations' response to issues relating to upper spine payments. To have introduced TLRs at the same time would have caused what was seen as unacceptable interlinking of the two issues. Secondly, the radical future potential changes for the school, including movement to a new site, was seen as 'opportunistic' in that the community needed an evolving mechanism for transition and therefore a slower speed of introduction of TLRs was relevant.

The potential for TLRs to offer an opportunity for creativity and innovation was openly accepted but it was interesting to note that the headteacher felt that there could have been much more preparatory thinking and planning from central sources and greater contextualisation within local, national and international dimensions so that schools were not left simply with 'a blank sheet of paper' from which to introduce key reforms. This was not a reflection of the lack of creativity by the school but a reflection of the normal challenging time scales that schools are expected to work to in the current

wave of major education reforms. One of the most interesting aspects of this school's response to TLRs was the essential religious context of the community that sets out clearly the philosophical basis on which all decisions are made across the whole range of school issues.

Putting religious contexts aside, the school could also not take away the context of the impending reorganisation that was taking place within the local authority – perhaps a reform 'greater in people's minds' than the requirement for TLR introduction. Even more poignant were the current challenges being created by particular professional associations' position on a specific staffing issue and it was clear that no productive TLR creativity could be considered with such a 'negative' backdrop. Clearly TLRs would have been "dragged into the mix" and yet because there was current dialogue being undertaken, there was an opportunity to "signal certain issues" in terms of roles and responsibilities of staff which would support the eventual introduction of TLRs.

This 'creep fed' methodology was seen as a strength in TLR development and indeed had led to there being some elements already in place, particularly in relation to the rewording of current roles and the school's changing response to the pastoral care of students. Leaving the full implementation of TLRs to the last moment meant that it was not a key focus at the time of interview but it was recognised as being instrumental in modifying the names of specific roles, for example, 'seconds in department' became subject trainers and non-teaching pastoral staff were created, linking future TLR introduction with the expectations of workforce reforms to flatten and reorganise the senior leadership team (SLT).

The overall impression created by the school's response to TLRs was one of enormous contextualisation that set the agenda for any creative and innovative reform from whatever source.

Typologies

Reflecting on the case studies described above, it is clear that four broad themes emerged from these discussions on the approaches taken by headteachers to the issue of TLR introduction. These can be developed into four broad 'typologies' under which their responses could be grouped:

- radicalisation
- creativity
- contextualisation
- assimilation

As noted above, this typology distils the common characteristics of the approaches these schools adopted to implementing TLRs. As such it provides a framework for considering the strategies utilised by other schools to this and indeed other initiatives. However, at the same time it should be recognised that relatively few schools would be likely to meet the 'ideal' types described in this framework.

Radicalisation

The literature review referred to the capacity for school leaders to engage in the exciting and modern education agenda within which the ability to provide and sustain national transformational leadership was very much centred on the individual activity of schools. There was no sense from the majority of interviewees that TLRs had led to or been an impetus for any radical whole-school change. Instead respondents were more likely to use terms such 'dismantling', 'simplification' and 'rationalisation' to describe reorganisation undertaken as part of the move to TLRs. For instance,

one headteacher reflected that the need to maintain a traditional structure was essential not only for the continued success of their highly regarded pastoral work but also for the potential negative impact on the perceptions of their parent body of any radical change. This was an interesting scenario in that the potential perception of a group of stakeholders to radical change may have created in their minds a loss of trust and faith in the capacity of the school to provide the continuing high standards for which it was recognised. There was a real tension between the education capacity of radical change versus the clear and well-established outcomes of a historic 'tradition'.

Nevertheless, beyond the majority of these case study schools, some further evidence was found of an increasing number of schools where TLRs had prompted a more fundamental reconsideration of leadership structures. For instance, some schools had effectively created new staffing structures that were built on either the underlying strands or consequently developed four 'deeps'[1] of personalised learning (Hargreaves 2004) in their attempts to achieve a strong response to the *Every Child Matters* agenda. Interestingly some of the respondents had decided to use TLRs as a mechanism by which they could radically change "key aspects", departments or policies in a focused way. They did not use TLRs as a vehicle for whole-school change but as a way of "radically modifying" a specific structure that was perceived to be doing well or in need of reform. This was in relation to team performance, individual performance, specific-subject and/or Key Stage performance.

In the words of some of the headteachers, radicalisation is based on the notion of schools starting with "a blank sheet of paper that used to have writing on it", seeing "new initiatives as genuine opportunities for real and sustainable change of accepted practice" and "using national reform as a way of supporting already effective and implemented reforms under way within the school". These perceptions were based on other initiatives where the respondents had felt able to take risks with "no cost to current delivery". Radicalisation, well evidenced in schools B and E, did not necessarily imply a deep sense of creativity; more the ability to take a moment in time to use current knowledge to approach an issue from a completely different angle. As one headteacher said with real passion, "I do not want to create the wheel but simply realign or reattach it to drive learning in a different direction". He talked of this much more in the sense of a "scientific, pragmatic approach to change" rather than a "creative and higher risk" methodology.

Creativity

A strongly related theme to radicalisation centred on the extent to which leaders were willing/able to display a creative approach to introducing TLRs. This aspect drew a very mixed reaction from the respondents and reflected the full spectrum of approaches to applying creativity to what was termed a "golden opportunity" by one of the headteachers. The six respondents talked freely of other scenarios within which they felt their creativity was well evidenced, whether it was in relation to whole-school strategic planning or restructuring pastoral activity. TLRs, however, had only really provided a real sense of whole-school creativity in schools A and C from totally opposing ends of the spectrum.

At one extreme, TLRs were considered to be completely the wrong approach for taking the whole issue of accountability forward, as they failed to distinguish between new entrants who were "potential leaders" and those "destined to become high order classroom practitioners". This respondent was clear that the outstanding creative approach they had taken to developing staff on entry to the profession was "deeply

[1] The four 'deeps' of personalised learning are summarised as: deep learning, deep support, deep exchange and deep leadership; see Vacher (2007).

hampered" by TLRs. It would no doubt take a very creative approach to balance this pioneering development with the legal requirements of staff restructuring but this was not perceived as an issue for that school. At the other extreme the introduction of TLRs provided the opportunity to take an innovative and creative approach to changing staff attitudes to 'learning', particularly by redefining job descriptions and empowering line management and broadening change to include all support staff in their link to the learning process. This was truly developed in the sense of 'brainstorming' the power of TLRs where there were no preconceptions of structural outcomes. Creativity was seen as "the power to innovate without the constraints of current structures, attitudes and expectation".

Interestingly, nearly all respondents talked of using the creative power of "language and word" to effect change. Carefully chosen words could "change perception of role" and empower emerging leaders within the school to be "creative in their own right". Two respondents talked of "releasing potential" at all levels within which the emergence of individual creativity was seen as evidence of a school "genuinely committed to distributive leadership".

This momentum for modifying job descriptions/role specifications was supported by all respondents, particularly in the challenge to the traditional approach to the pastoral work of the school. Mention was made of creatively "regearing" or "reworking" the traditional head of Year role with three of the schools already moving to 'heads of learning' to reflect the increased focus on student tracking – once again, the creative use of language to bring change. In a most interesting move, one headteacher was particularly creative in his use of the leadership spine to significantly expand the senior team, although the overall trend from respondents was that TLRs led to a 'flattening' and reduction in SLTs. It also led to a more creative use of non-teachers in senior positions. This was as a reflection of ongoing and increasing distributive leadership within institutions. In principle respondents saw creativity as a mechanism by which new ideas and innovations could be brought to the education debate as opposed to the more "managerial restructuring" through radicalisation.

Contextualisation

Perhaps the least surprising of the four typologies was that of *contextualisation.* This centres on the reflection that the 'context' of the school was the most influential factor on each of the school leaders, whatever other approach they had felt prepared to take. Although most marked in school F, all contextual situations of the six respondents varied greatly (through aspects of selection, federation, reorganisation, single-sex provision and local circumstance) but remained pivotal in the amount of 'room for manoeuvre' leaders felt they had. They all spoke equally of internal and external contexts that influence decision making and also talked of historic, traditional, perceptual and local influences that would ameliorate against any sense of "freedom to move the education agenda forward".

There were consistent themes relating to:

- Sensitivity to the political dimension of schools. For example, a feeling that union objections to upper pay spine progression could potentially restrict the opportunity for radical change.
- Opportunities for headteachers to challenge a wide variety of staffing issues relating to:
    - individual performance
    - historic resistance to change
    - modification of traditional and duality in roles

    - anomalous structural issues.
- The redefining and restructuring of accountability and line management.
- Re-emphasising the need for leaders at all levels rather than managers.

The most interesting discussions were with those leaders that were seemingly 'constrained' or 'bedevilled' by their contexts. The debate was clearly centred on the tension between the need for vision and the realities of the schools' particular contexts. What was conceded was that vision had to precede context because there was a sense that to do otherwise would be to give into "unchangeable attitudes" and "agencies resistant to change". The respondents accepted that they were in their own words "pioneers" or "instruments" of change – those empowered to change the face of education to provide appropriate learning communities for the modern generation. However, contextualisation, exemplified most strongly in school F, was a reality that made 'shorter-term decision making' more relevant or 'powerful' than longer-term strategic innovation which could potentially impact on local and/or national reform. As an aside, two respondents most 'constrained' by context said that the issue of the age and experience of the leader was also a major contextual influence. Increasing longevity in the role meant that the "preparedness for risk and innovation was overtaken by the politics of the local context".

At the heart of the debate was the leaders' ability to be able to keep the 'bigger picture' in their minds as they were expected to provide short-term solutions for immediate need. As one respondent stated, "context, particularly political, is the death of all proactivity and certainly of the fulfilment of creativity".

Assimilation

There was an overwhelming sense that translating or assimilating current structures into the new TLR allowances was the norm. This was based strongly on the notion that if there was already a basis for progression and sustainable achievement, why change? However, the appearance of TLRs on the scene did allow for a statutory consultation period, engagement with governors and consequent debate on how restructuring could impact on a wide range of institutional matters even if the ultimate decision was not to cause significant disruption to well-tested structures at an "already frenetic time". The appearance of TLRs did allow the headteachers to address key leadership issues relating to:

- the empowerment of middle managers through distributive leadership
- raising the profile of 'learning'
- raising the profile of 'tracking'
- creating the stimulus for staff understanding the need for effective 'change management' by headteachers and at all levels – changing perception by renaming a number of responsibility posts without changing the nature of the role

School D was a clear pioneer of assimilation. Evidence from an Ofsted inspection had given strong support to the effectiveness of not only curricular but also pastoral structures. To have used TLRs as a basis for further structural change would have been 'ill-timed' and 'counter-productive' not only to recent restructuring but also the perceptions of the vast majority of stakeholders. There was a very interesting discussion in relation to the temptation for schools to "simply and unthinkingly buy in to nationally proposed changes". Radicalisation and creativity were perceived as being valuable at all levels, not just on a 'whole-school basis' but also at any level of the institution. It was suggested that a perceived lack of creativity may be a simple representation of a well-considered and pragmatic professional judgement that understands that "stability is the greatest basis for change".

There was great risk in suggesting that the majority response of assimilation nationally was necessarily a reflection of a lack of creativity or desire for change. For the profession, assimilation was a pragmatic, timely and sensible response to what was perceived as “yet another initiative” that had not been well thought through in the myriad of other issues impacting on schools. Assimilation was a proactive response and not a decision of convenience.

Conclusion

It is reasonable to suggest that these schools mainly adopted an 'assimilatory' approach to the introduction of the new TLRs. There are clear examples borne out partially by one of the respondents that TLRs were used as a vehicle for potentially radical reform. To do that it appeared that the school would have had to already been in a position in terms of innovative reorganisation through which TLRs could be used as an agent of further change. This 'radicalisation' as opposed to 'creativity' seemed to bridge the tension between the potential risks involved as opposed to the ongoing internal desire for needed reform.

For all schools it is inevitable that the introduction of TLRs would be driven by the specific contextual nature of the individual school. There is, of course, a presumption that the arrival of new responsibility allowances was accepted by the profession as a whole, with a shared view that they could genuinely raise the levels of accountability relating to the teaching and learning taking place within schools. This was challenged in particular by one of the interviewees who emphasised again the need to distinguish, at the point of entry to the profession, those destined for institutional leadership rather than those destined and motivated to become high quality teaching practitioners.

Fundamentally an 'assimilatory' approach, replicating existing staffing structures, was seen by most respondents as the appropriate response.

While some headteachers accepted that a creative, innovative or radical opportunity may have been missed, TLRs were largely seen by these leaders as a 'managerial' moment to tackle specific short-term goals, particularly in redefining job descriptions/role specifications. However, it would be reasonable to suggest that even if there were not transparent structural changes, TLRs were certainly the impetus for headteachers to tackle a range of pressing issues that were perceived in some senses as holding the key development of the school back. Indeed, evidence from the dialogues showed clearly that the leaders believed 'radicalisation and creativity' had a necessary place throughout all levels of the institution, that assimilation would not prevent this and that the contextualisation of TLRs need not prevent the pursuit of a strongly held vision.

Responding to the contextual needs of their schools was of foremost concern for these leaders. Barriers of time and resources were not mentioned, but there was clear recognition that the need for 'shorter-term' solutions limited opportunities to consider approaches that provided structures which would be productive and sustainable over the longer term, both locally and nationally. Even though there was a broader belief in and desire for creativity and innovation, this was tempered by the need to recognise the day-to-day demands on the school and to develop an approach that offered appropriate levels of 'contextualisation'. Factors in this included:

- the need to demonstrate continued improvements in performance, in response to demands from the inspection framework and the general public
- the continued and potentially restrictive view of a headteacher's role within the profession, in the wider school community and in the government's view
- the sense that creativity is 'too risky' as it flies in the face of the compliant nature of current expectation

A recently heard apocryphal tale described how groups of medical and education professionals from the 19th century were transported forward 150 years in time to see the structural changes to their profession. It would appear that previous medical professionals would be 'lost in advancement', yet education professionals would see

little structural difference. Does this reflect a culture of conservatism and general aversion to risk, or a lack of stomach and moral fibre for more radical approaches to change? Arguably if the opportunities for change offered by TLRs and other initiatives in the future are to be maximised, more headteachers need to be encouraged to step away from the relative security of the 'contextualisation' approach and instead embrace higher risk strategies characterised by creativity, innovation and radicalisation. In this way, then, 'closing the deal' is not enough. Instead, leaders must focus on the 'bigger deal' of how they can lever the changes required to secure the personalised education that students in their schools deserve – the moral imperative that they seek to address.

When the interviewees were challenged on the broader issues of instilling and sustaining creativity and innovation in school leaders there was a genuine consensus in terms of response. Although it is difficult to generalise, the main issues reflected on by respondents were:

- School communities have an enormous capacity for innovation and creativity but this does not necessarily need to be at the whole-school level.
- Incremental change can be equally powerful if centred firmly within a strong vision.
- Schools have shown many ways of responding to the *Every Child Matters* agenda and TLRs are only one element of that response.
- The pace of required structural reform does not allow for considered reflection on the broader strategic future of schools.
- The greatest barriers to innovation and creativity are the dual constraints of annual examination performance and scrutiny and ongoing accountability from a wide range of stakeholders.
- The greatest creative opportunities lie within the combined learning of students, staff, governors and the local community that they serve.

The schools visited were led by inspirational, pragmatic and creative leaders. Interestingly all respondents suggested directly or indirectly that there was a need to look critically at the current standards for headteachers, particularly in relation to other external leadership structures that are used across all public and private sectors designed to encourage innovation. There had to be a clear look at the style of leader needed to lead a modern education community into the 21st century – one that could build and sustain education reform. The 'reculturing' of schools spoken of so frequently in research has to be seen not only in the absorption and translation of national directive but also in the language of leadership and in the willingness of leaders to be able to take risks and to be creative. Short-term contextualisation restricts and indeed prevents long-term reform. In their eyes, reforms such as TLRs can only have any real impact if they are introduced in an educational culture that respects creativity and accepts the consequent risks. Until those conditions are in place there will continue to be missed opportunities for sustainable reform within which initiatives such as TLRs are ultimately 'no big deal'.

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