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DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP CAPACITY IN ENGLISH SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES: GLOBAL POSITIONING AND LOCAL MEDIATION

by MIKE WALLACE, *Cardiff University*, ROSEMARY DEEM, *Royal Holloway, University of London*, DERMOT O'REILLY, *Lancaster University* and MICHAEL TOMLINSON, *Keele University*

ABSTRACT: Government responses to globalisation include developing educational leaders as reformers for workforce competitiveness in the knowledge economy. Qualitative research tracked interventions involving national leadership development bodies to acculturate leaders in secondary schools and universities. Acculturating leaders as reformers was mediated through interaction with professional cultures valuing autonomy. Yet mediation supported the government's global positioning through adapting reforms and independent innovation.

Keywords: global positioning, leadership development, policy mediation, school leadership, university leadership, acculturation

1. EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP FOR ECONOMIC GAIN

The purpose of this paper is to explore how the development of public service leadership in general, and educational leadership in particular, are increasingly being deployed as a 'soft' policy lever by western governments, positioning themselves to secure competitive national advantage in the global economy. Evidence from the research to be reported here on change agency in English public services suggests this lever to be relatively ineffective. The implementation of governmental efforts at economic global positioning through the indirect means of public service leadership development ran up against moderate local mediation by senior service organisation staff, who held hard to their professional service values.

Extending the contribution of leadership to public service provision has become 'big business' over the last decade. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2001a, 2001b) has long called for greater investment in organisational leadership across member nations:

The most important role of public sector leaders has been to solve the problems and challenges faced in a specific environment. When we say we want more leadership in the public sector, what we are really looking for is people who will promote institutional adaptations in the public interest. Leadership in this sense is not value neutral. It is a positive espousal of the need to promote certain fundamental values that can be called public spiritedness.

Building public service leadership capacity has become a popular focus for governmental policymaking. In education, evidence of national variation in school performance (OECD, 2007) is fuelling interest in developing leadership capacity as a lever for raising educational standards (Pont *et al.*, 2008). Beyond the national level, meanwhile, the European Commission has taken a keen interest in the contribution of universities to a ‘Europe of Knowledge’ (European Commission, 2003, 2005), emphasising the importance of university autonomy so that their leaders can fully exercise their powers (European Commission, 2006).

The link between public service leadership and global positioning for economic prosperity is inevitably oblique. It is widely held to be significant by policymakers (e.g. Bottery, 2004; DFEE, 1998; DFES, 2003; OPSR 2002), whereas academic researchers are more reticent on any direct causal link (Deem *et al.*, 2007; Hodgson *et al.*, 2007; Jessop *et al.*, 2008). More specifically, educational leadership is regarded as stimulating cultural change that, in turn, facilitates the reforms desired by many western governments to make their schools, colleges and universities world-class (Altbach, 2004; DFES, 2004a; Marginson, 2006) – an idea in which the World Bank has also shown interest (Salmi, 2009).

As one might expect, governmental endeavours to improve the quality and economic orientation of their national education systems are more directly reflected in frontline organisations which directly engage with economic activity than those focusing on preparation for it. For senior staff in schools, the contribution that their students could eventually make to the nation’s future standing in the global economy remains largely implicit. School leaders generally focus more immediately on the local positioning of their school relative to other schools. By contrast, senior management teams in universities tend to set greater store by explicit global positioning, encouraged by government policies such as incentives to develop a stronger partnership with business (DBIS, 2009). Many chase after international league table rankings and classifications related to their research and other core activities (Deem *et al.*, 2008, 2009) and seek alliances and collaborations with universities in other countries (Beerkens, 2004). Western universities are increasingly developing international policies (Al-Youssef, 2009), which include seeking international students and international staff, as well as internationalising their curriculum and establishing off-shore campuses (Welch, 2010). Governments are also concerned with these league tables but their inconsistent actions may make individual university efforts to raise their ranking more difficult. For example, at the time of writing, severe restrictions have been imposed in the UK on recruiting academic staff from outside the EU. But the proportion of academic staff from overseas is a key element in some international rankings, and global universities need to be able to recruit their staff from all over the world.

2. LEVERAGING EDUCATION AS A VEHICLE FOR ECONOMIC PROSPERITY AND RECOVERY

Innovation and reforms enact governmental global positioning strategies and, as we shall see, leadership is conceived as a conduit for their implementation. First,

the *standards agenda* underlying reform aims to equip the workforce for occupying a high-skill, high-wage economic niche based on expert knowledge and service (Brown *et al.*, 2001, 2006; Olssen and Peters 2005), thus shifting away from unequal competition in manufacturing against the low-wage economies of industrialising nations. An early White Paper from the 1997–2010 New Labour government's education department stated: 'We are talking about investing in human capital in the age of knowledge. To compete in the global economy, to live in a civilized society and to develop the talents of each and every one of us, we will have to unlock the potential of every young person' (DFEE, 1997, p. 3). Further: 'Excellence at the top is not matched by high standards for the majority of children. We have some first-class schools and our best students compare with the best in the world. But by comparison with other industrialized countries, achievement by the average student is just not good enough' (DFEE, 1997, p. 10).

Second, there has been an increasingly conspicuous focus on schools taking a role in *preparation for the world of work* through 'enterprise activity' and work experience being integrated into the curriculum: 'From 2010 "employability skills" and "transferable skills" will be embedded throughout the curriculum' (DCSF, 2009, p. 23). School leaders were allotted a related role in negotiating relationships with business organisations: 'Schools and colleges should identify a member of the leadership team to be responsible for creating, managing and developing relationships with business' (DCSF, 2008, p. 6).

In government eyes the contribution of higher education towards economic global positioning is more direct, as witnessed by the recent White Paper:

... in a globalized knowledge economy such as Britain's, the university system plays a critical role in equipping people with the skills they need to prosper. In such an economy, there is a premium on sophisticated skills, intellectual confidence and employability, so these must be among the key returns from higher education. (DBIS, 2009, p. 40)

This vision was to be realised via resource incentive and sanction: 'We will enable universities to compete for funds to provide courses in subjects relevant to Britain's economic future, working in partnership with business. Institutions unable to meet such strategic needs can expect to see their funding reduced to provide resources for those who can' (DBIS, 2009, p. 4).

Focusing on the economic (rather than social and cultural) purposes of higher education is also becoming common across other European countries and North America (Gumport, 2000). As Boulton and Lucas (2008, p. 5) note in talking about European universities, higher education institutions are increasingly described as:

... vectors of the contemporary skilling of an increasing segment of the population and as providers of innovation that can be translated into advantage in a fast changing global economic environment. This involves the use of regulation and incentives (especially financial) to obtain forms of behaviour in universities that provide outcomes defined as desirable within this short-term frame of reference.

Third, *efficiency* gains are continuously sought to rein in the burgeoning expenditure on education and other public services that inhibits economic growth (Foster

and Plowden, 1996). Educational improvement has long embraced increasing the efficiency of provision (DFES, 2004b, p. 105):

Over the Spending Review period the Department, in partnership with key stakeholders, will work to secure efficiency and productivity gains throughout education and children's services amounting to £4.3 billion, by reducing administration costs, reforming procurement and unlocking productivity gains from technology and workforce improvement.

With the global economy in recession following the financial crisis, the perennial public service efficiency imperative has been ratcheted-up in the interests of economic recovery, hence placing pressure on leadership to make it happen. Indicatively, the UK's National School of Government, responsible for government civil servant leadership training, has launched an 'Achieving More with Less' workshop series which includes 'leading and influencing the delivery system through collaboration, partnerships and engagement' (NSOG, 2010).

The advent of severe cuts in higher education funding (HEFCE, 2010) has been accompanied by the declared aspiration to maintain quality. It is becoming ever more critical for governments to balance delimiting expenditure on costly public services in the short term with maintaining sufficient minimum investment to foster the economic productivity needed for a return to prosperity in the longer term. Leadership is expected to play its part.

3. NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT BODIES FOR ACCULTURATING LEADERS – A RISKY INVESTMENT?

Of all government-supported efforts to develop leadership for improving educational performance directed ultimately towards economic ends, school leadership training in England is perhaps the most extensive, centralised and far-reaching, with extensive use of new information technology. According to Bush (2008, p. 73), 'The establishment of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) in 2000 is probably the most significant global initiative for leadership development.' Its role in promoting leadership as a conduit for implementing government-driven reforms of the day was soon reflected in NCSL documentation, as where:

The College [NCSL] will help school leaders to find their way through this [reform] agenda. We believe that confident and empowered leaders will use it to create a unique educational vision for their school. The College will be a source of support, challenge and refreshment for leaders in their quest to renew and recreate their school. (NCSL, 2001)

(The NCSL was recently renamed the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services, reflecting an expansion of its remit. For the sake of clarity here, we have referred to the NCSL throughout.) The Centre for Excellence in Leadership (for post-school colleges) soon followed in 2003. These initiatives informed the representatives of university leaders' professional associations who

established the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE) in 2004. UK universities – apart from one private institution – receive significant public funding alongside international student fees, consultancy, research and knowledge-transfer income. Despite its non-governmental origins, the LFHE initially received much of its funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England, though the proportion had reduced to 19 per cent by 2008–09 (LFHE, 2009).

The governance and focus of the NCSL and LFHE varies with the different proportion of public funding for each national leadership development body (NLDB) and related governmental direction of their sector. At one extreme, the NCSL has a close relationship with government which funds its provision (and so was able to cut this funding by 5 per cent as a public expenditure-saving measure in 2010), reviews its performance and annually updates its remit. At the other, the LFHE has an arm's-length relationship with government. While its governance is independent, we have noted how it is still part-dependent on government agency funding. The tight NCSL-government link is reflected in the way its provision is more attuned to government-driven reform than that of the LFHE. The NCSL's flagship leadership development programme, the mandatory National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH), for those who aspire to headship, is linked to government-set 'National Standards'. In contrast, the LFHE does not orient its leadership development courses around a core standard of competencies (none exists for the sector). Also, the NCSL is evaluated by government partly in terms of nationwide improvement in school examination results. Whereas evaluation of the LFHE by higher education funding bodies to inform future investment decisions does not entail measurement against externally-set performance criteria, either relating to the LFHE's performance or that of the sector (Oakleigh Consulting, 2006).

Yet it is questionable how far this significant government or private investment in leadership development for different public or part-public funded education sectors is capable of yielding the envisioned return: trained leaders who contribute proactively to global positioning, whether government-driven (in relation to schools) or also organisationally-driven (in universities). Leadership development is like many other public policies (Hill and Hupe, 2002; Wallace, 2007): diffuse, complex and open to reinterpretation as it is mobilised and mediated across a national service system (Wallace *et al.*, 2011). Unlike 'hard' policy levers that secure behavioural compliance (say, mandates backed by punitive sanctions or resource allocation according to explicit criteria), leadership development is 'soft'. It operates by attempting to mould beliefs and values underpinning action through persuasive language, encouragement, interpersonal technique and example. Leadership development thus represents a form of 'culture management' (Wallace and Pocklington, 2002) for attempting instrumentally to acculturate participants, whether as conduits for reform or for alternative change agendas. But cultural beliefs and values are not amenable to direct manipulation in the same way that hard policy levers can induce behavioural and, to some extent, structural compliance.

So pulling this soft policy lever does not guarantee hard results. Launching leadership development initiatives into organisational contexts with professional cultures historically featuring extensive autonomy over educational provision and its organisation leaves room for local mediation, helping to sustain those cultures. Despite decades of government-driven reform, accumulating evidence indicates that professional cultures remain relatively resistant to incorporation into government political projects (Deem, 2008; Hoyle and Wallace, 2005). With sufficient surveillance and sanctions, hard policy levers can minimally achieve 'resigned compliance' (Farrell and Morris, 2004). Soft levers minimally seek more, since overt compliance can mask covert subversion sustaining unmodified professional values. Mandating can be used to force participation, as in the compulsory NPQH qualification for aspiring headteachers (though the result has been that many teachers who gain the qualification do not then proceed to headship). But even such a hard edge to a soft policy lever provides no guarantee that participants will be acculturated as desired.

The remaining sections of this paper explore the problematic nature of this soft policy lever. First we summarise the theoretical focus and methods of the research to be reported. Second, we portray how promoting leadership development in English secondary schools and universities differentially connects with government global positioning (and also to some individual university global positioning) in response to economic and political globalisation. Third, we show how the implementation of leadership development through NLDBs is subject to moderate mediation. Finally, we draw tentative conclusions about the relative unmanageability of leadership development as a soft policy lever which nevertheless appears diffusely to support global positioning.

4. RESEARCHING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FOR SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES IN ENGLAND

Our findings were generated as part of the qualitative study 'Developing Organisation Leaders in the Public Services'. The research team explored how leaders and those who aspired to become leaders in English secondary schools, universities and healthcare organisations sought and experienced support for their development in their leadership role, particularly in connection with change. The investigation made special reference to the NLDB for each public service sector, seeking to determine how far leaders and aspirants were encouraged to – and actually did – perceive themselves as change agents: whether acting on behalf of government, other stakeholder groups, or both.

The research adopted a pluralistic perspective on interaction informed by a neo-institutionalist approach (Dimaggio, 2001) towards culturally-determined uses of power in mobilising and mediating leadership development. Government-driven education reforms were viewed as a New Labour *political project* for the public services, coupled with a *discursive strategy* to shape thinking, and a loose configuration of *control technologies*, including NLDBs – constituting means of

translating political aspiration and discursive intent into practice. Intermediaries *orchestrate* (Wallace, 2007; Wallace and Schneller, 2008) the change process across system-administrative levels, brokering its cultural acceptance and implementation or acting as independent change agents for their sector. They include school and university leaders, and senior staff in government and NLDBs, who contribute to steering the brokering process and mediate change as it interacts with existing discursive frameworks and institutionalised practices reflecting their institutional and professional cultures.

Data were generated through critical discourse analysis (CDA) and confidential, semi-structured, individual interviews conducted between September 2006 and July 2008. The government's acculturation strategy and its mediation at national administrative levels was explored primarily via CDA (Fairclough, 2003) of documentary sources listed in Table 1, supported by interviews with government civil servants, politicians, professional association representatives, NLDB senior staff and trainers, listed in Table 2.

The mediation of this acculturation strategy at secondary school and university levels was investigated primarily through interviews with leaders and aspirants, around half of whom were re-interviewed a year later. Data analysis informed by the approach of Huberman and Miles (2002) entailed transcribing interviews, coding and analysing them using computer software, developing matrices to display comparative findings, and scanning the dataset to explore emergent themes and the contextual richness of particular settings.

5. LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND GLOBAL POSITIONING

There was clear evidence in government documentation of the logic linking enhanced educational leadership with economic prosperity. This vision was to be achieved through improved educational outcomes directed towards the government's instrumental reform goals. As hinted earlier, educational reform for

TABLE 1: *Documentary sources for critical discourse analysis*

Documentary Sources (1997–2008)	No. Documents Coded
Labour Party documents	3
Government documents	11
Government education department documents	16
Government documents addressed to NCSL	6
NCSL documents	18
LFHE documents	20
Secondary school professional association and other stakeholder documents	6
Higher education professional association and other stakeholder documents	2
Total	82

TABLE 2: Interviews conducted in 2007–2008

Type of interviewee	Timing of Round, No. Interviews			
	1	2	3	4
	Summer 2007	Autumn 2007–Spring 2008	Spring-Summer 2008	Summer–Autumn 2008
Secondary school headteacher	5			1
Secondary school deputy heads and other senior staff	20			10
University vice-chancellor	6			5
University other senior staff	24			14
NCSL senior staff		3		
NCSL-associated trainer		7		
LFHE senior staff		4		
LFHE-linked trainer		4		
Representative of professional and stakeholder associations concerned with schools		4		
Representative of professional and stakeholder associations concerned with universities		7		
Politician previously responsible for school education			1	
Civil servant from government education department			2	
Civil servant from government higher education department			2	
Civil servant, HEFCE			3	
Civil servant from government cabinet office			3	
Total (125 interviews with 95 informants)	55	29	11	30

economic benefit was commonly expressed in terms of education-business links, here covering both the schools and university sectors (DFES, 2004b, p. 5):

Aims of reform:

- all schools are extended schools; community schools; healthy schools; inclusive schools; and enterprising schools (with real links to business) . . .

- our nation benefits from a thriving university system that gives excellent teaching to all with the potential to benefit; which provides the nation with world-class research capability; and which works with business to provide the skills the nation most needs and to translate research into innovation effectively.

But in this documentation the envisaged role of organisational leaders in forging such links with business was articulated mainly in relation to universities, as where:

. . . these institutions . . . need the leadership, governance and management to put in place outstanding research planning, sound policies with respect to intellectual property, and a willingness to collaborate with others, and to help exploit the knowledge they generate. The Lambert Review of links between higher education and business will ask business for its views on the present governance, management and leadership arrangements and their effectiveness in supporting good research and knowledge transfer and providing relevant skills for the economy. (DFES, 2003, p. 31)

Most tellingly, the language of these educational documents is that of competitive economic globalisation (Fairclough, 2000). Schools are to be ‘specialist’, universities are to concentrate on diversifying their ‘missions’ – drawing from such economic themes as knowledge transfer and regional economic development (DFES, 2003), and both sectors are regularly exhorted to be ‘world-class’. All these terms, and the ideas informing them, originate from the business discourses of niche marketing, specialisation, mission statements, branding and competition. For example, the following extract (DFES, 2003, p. 10) explicitly frames higher education in economic terms: ‘In a fast-changing and increasingly competitive world, the role of higher education in equipping the labour force with appropriate and relevant skills, in stimulating innovation and supporting productivity and in enriching the quality of life is central.’

By comparison, commitment as organisational leaders to educational reform for economic benefit was not confined to our university informants. Several secondary school leaders spoke of their endeavour in line with this government reform thrust to prepare students more effectively for contributing to the knowledge economy. In the words of one headteacher:

If you said that it’s a government reform to raise standards, then I would say ‘I’m 100 per cent behind that’. And that is my reason for being here, because I mean when I was a kid there was 80 per cent manual jobs, and in 2020 there’s going to be 4 per cent, so we’re in a knowledge society.

Elsewhere a senior teacher with management responsibility for older students drew attention to the need for educational reform to link more effectively with business employers so that they would accept new vocational qualifications designed to equip students with work-related skills:

I’m committed because I think young people need a better deal [between the ages of] 14–19. And I think what there is at the present is not suitable, and therefore I think

the idea of a [vocational education] diploma is a very good one. The problem lies not within education; I think it lies in the wider world. It's getting people to accept that qualification. And does an employer say, 'Well, I want three A Levels [traditional academic qualifications] and a budgerigar' or do they say, 'I will accept a diploma'?

Our university informants commonly accepted that their leadership activity was part of the government-driven attempt to position the nation as a major player in the global knowledge economy. One director of planning noted how:

We have more people going in to university. And whilst they're at university, not only they are benefiting from exposure to their own academic interests, but they are learning things that are of genuine use to employers, regardless of what the job might be. So I think that's the first thing, really, making sure that we're competitive on a global, economic playing field . . . I think he [the Prime Minister] sees a very clear link between having significant percentages of the population educated, and economic productivity, and sort of long term gain for society as a whole.

There was also some acknowledgement of institutional efforts at national positioning relative to other universities. As a director of academic services saw it: 'I think universities are becoming much more like businesses . . . I mean so competitive now, and trying to make sure that you're sort of up there in all the different league tables, and that you're competing with your . . . comparative group.'

Overall, a diffuse linkage between leadership, leadership development and educational reform was detectable across documentation and interviews at all system levels, including within the LFHE. But extension of the logic to the economic imperative underlying these reforms was more explicit in political party and government documents and interviews than the evidence from other levels. NLDB documentation and interviews articulated leadership to implement reforms, the educational improvements sought through them (e.g. Strategy Unit, 2008), and ongoing improvement efforts largely as a 'public good' in themselves. Yet the LFHE documentation further articulated the economic linkage through activities that semi-autonomous universities are better placed than public-funded schools to undertake. Thus nine of the fifteen key challenges for UK higher education identified by the LFHE are directly related to institutions' market performance and other issues linked to the government's agenda for universities to contribute to the knowledge-based economy (LFHE, 2008, p. 3):

- continuing management of student numbers (UK and world-wide)
- widening participation through provision of 'fair access' and bursaries
- funding, including fee setting, fundraising, diversifying income sources and full economic costing
- marketing for the positioning of universities through identity creation and 'branding'
- competition inside the UK and responses involving alliances, collaborations and mergers
- management of research including research contracts, career development and recruitment

- internationalisation involving competition or collaboration, the contribution of private universities, and the development of a European research arena
- business, regional and community interactions
- knowledge transfer, economic and social regeneration.

Senior LFHE staff explicitly acknowledged government expectations that university leaders should work to support its economic (rather than cultural or social) goals:

If you look at the government agenda now for higher education, it's very much thinking about employability and responding to the needs of society and the economy. I would've thought there would be very, very few, if any, leaders in HE [higher education] who didn't believe it was necessary to be responsive to that agenda. Even if they're suggesting, well, actually we need more research to ensure that we are underpinning the way the economy is moving forward, or if they're saying, we need to put a lot more emphasis in getting in a wider profile of students to make sure they're better prepared to deliver in the economy.

This view was echoed by several university leaders, as in the comment by one associate dean: 'The governmental agenda is, particularly for institutions like this, for leadership within HE to be able to provide the workforce of the future.' In sum, leadership in higher education institutions was implicitly connected with advancing university global positioning consistent with the knowledge-intensive economic niche towards which government global positioning is directed. In general this positioning was accepted by leaders in schools, and to some extent by university leaders. The latter, especially in the older chartered universities (rather than the former polytechnics), tended to question the government's right to impose policy and regulation on universities whilst providing a decreasing amount of money to them.

6. THE MEDIATION OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

There was near-universal identification amongst informants at all system levels with being a 'transformational' or visionary leader within their organisational setting, including those four-fifths of school and of university leaders who had experienced the provision of the NCSL or LFHE respectively, and the remainder who had not. This finding suggests that the government's discourse strategy promoting this conception of leadership (O'Reilly and Reed, 2010) has made a significant impact on secondary schools, since the self-perception of being a leader did not appear to depend on having been inducted into NLDB provision.

However, university leaders have long preferred being called leaders to managers. The focus on leadership almost certainly predates New Labour's efforts in this respect, beginning in 2004 (Deem *et al.*, 2007; Middlehurst, 1993). The emphasis on leadership by New Labour in its second term of office was related to its own conception of political leadership. One policymaker noted how a past government-wide leadership role was located within a leadership hierarchy with

the then Prime Minister at its apex: 'I was also a leader of the public service reform across government, I say a leader, not the leader, partly because I worked directly for [Tony] Blair. And people knew that I had his full confidence, and so that gave me a lot of authority.' Those in 'top' formal leadership positions in their organisations dwelt more on their role as the key promoters and 'carriers' of a vision to guide educational improvement efforts, and as mediators of external pressures for change. As one headteacher put it:

What I do is I have a clarity about 'What is our vision?', 'What is our purpose as a school?' . . . It's something that has come from the governors and it's something that's coalesced as well from staff. I both become the giver of the vision but also the crystalliser of the vision, so that it is a vision which is jointly owned and shared by every person in the organisation. And I also become in some ways the gatekeeper of external pressures for development. So that I act as a filter to say, 'Well this thing from the outside environment is something we can use to further our vision. This is something we're going to deadball because it doesn't serve our vision. Or this is something that legally we've got to do but we're not going to do it that way'. We're going to meet what [external requirements] we're required to meet but we're going to do it in such a way that it furthers our vision.

Roles as leaders were perceived to be partly context-related, as where a university vice-chancellor emphasised the promotion of academic excellence: 'I'm responsible for the academic leadership of the institution, the management of the institution, everything in the institution . . . and I suppose importantly, at least to me importantly, leadership academically.' Universities have long placed emphasis on academic excellence, but it is noticeable that the one area where this focus is not emphasised is in institutional leadership (Deem, 2009). Transformational leadership was frequently balanced in secondary schools and universities by less individualistic notions, especially 'distributed' and 'collaborative' leadership, connoting collective endeavour towards shared transformational goals. Yet the distribution of leadership was still relatively hierarchical in schools, consistent with findings from other research (MacBeath *et al.*, 2004), though less so universities (Bolden *et al.*, 2008). A headteacher pointed to the hierarchical distribution of leadership responsibilities accompanied by accountability to colleagues who occupied more senior roles:

Distributed leadership means there's a high level of personal empowerment within role, but equally it's matched by high levels of accountability. And at first colleagues saw it as, 'He's letting us do what we like.' It became very clear very quickly, however, that the accountability stem of it was something that people hadn't taken into account, and when the accountability kicked in people were surprised. Now the leadership team that I work with and the broader leadership team is quite well established at the moment, and they fully understand where we are in terms of empowerment and accountability and distributed leadership.

However, while secondary school and university leaders associated their leadership with change agency in the sense of proactively seeking to bring about change for improvement, they saw themselves as not acting exclusively on behalf

of central government or any other stakeholder group. They resented the idea of attempted acculturation as something being done to them. As leaders, they perceived themselves to have varying jurisdiction over their organisational response to reforms or other change pressures: minimally, over how a change was to be implemented, maximally, over whether to implement it (exemplified by the account of the first of the two headteachers quoted above).

Their jurisdiction also extended to initiating change. Most retained allegiance to their longer-standing professional service culture, whether as teachers or as lecturers and researchers who have become 'manager-academics'. However, there are differences between schools and HE. Academics tend to operate on a world stage in relation to their research, so those becoming leaders may bring this orientation to their management roles. Also, increasing numbers of senior university career administrators have come from the private sector and both these groups tend to think globally. In orchestrating educational change in their organisations, our informants implied that they were mediating any government attempt to acculturate them as leaders of reform. Greatest scope for alternative change agendas lay with universities: their curriculum is not government-driven and they are free to raise unregulated income from research and international students. Indeed, one faculty dean claimed that universities could and should themselves influence the government's policy agenda:

I don't think the sector should be merely reactive to policy, you know, in terms of the position that we take as a university. I would be appalled if we were merely reactive. So I think there's a great deal that the sector needs to do, perhaps more effectively than it does, to influence policy.

A moderate degree of policy mediation appeared to run throughout the education system. At the national level even the provision of the NCSL, despite being closely regulated by government, was mediated by those involved. Orchestration of provision within the NCSL – as with the LFHE – involved promoting generic leadership approaches. A senior member of NCSL staff stated that:

We don't have a model, if you like, of leadership. We support approaches to leadership which would include things like . . . the ability to read context, such as having well developed interpersonal skills, such as having high levels of self-awareness and self-management, such as technical understanding, knowledge and understanding of . . . what is the job about, and the core purpose of schools is learning and teaching.

LFHE staff we interviewed explicitly rejected the notion that their courses and workshops in any way reflected government priorities. Most university informants had a similar perception, since they had been introduced to a range of models of change management and encouraged to exchange their own ideas. Participants in NLDB provision were reportedly left to decide which reforms they must address, whether to adapt them to their local circumstances, how to integrate them into practice, and whether to pursue independent change agendas. However, informants from both NLDBs took the status quo for granted, in particular the framework

of organisational competition based on comparative measurement. There was no evidence that leadership development challenged leaders to try radically new practices in their organisations – indeed the opposite was the case. So according to our informants (Deem, 2010), in the LFHE programmes there was no evidence of an alternative being presented which would challenge the gradual replacement of loosely coupled and somewhat anarchic organisations (March and Olsen, 1989; Weick, 1976) by those that were more vertically and horizontally integrated, alongside the powerful growth of networks (Bleikie, 2010).

Therefore, while there was moderate mediation across the education system, it was limited and always consistent with the government's attempt to harness leadership development towards promoting education for economic ends. A few informants reported that NLDB provision had taught them to question which aspects of government reforms were legal requirements and which offered them more room to manoeuvre. But they also noted how this same provision was promoting private sector-style entrepreneurship, a key component of government-driven educational reform. A university pro vice-chancellor who had experienced the LFHE Top Management Programme reflected:

If we're kind of listing the things that I think could improve, could change [about the programme] . . . there is an uncritical model of leadership applied, which is a commercial model of leadership. It's a private sector model, it's the CEO of the company model and universities as businesses. So we had a lot of stuff about finance and, you know, very few people from universities brought in to talk to us, but plenty of people like the government, the Bank of England, and those kinds of people.

Overall, the soft policy lever of leadership development, especially through NLDBs, appears to have helped to shape the self-perceptions of senior staff – whether in secondary schools or universities – that they are leaders. While provision placed some emphasis on reform for global economic ends, it also fostered leaders' flexibility of organisational response. Yet this lever had reportedly made less direct impact on such responses to government-driven reform than hard levers which entailed externally imposed measurement of performance backed by the possibility of sanctions, financial consequences, or the risk of greater vulnerability in the service marketplace. In secondary schools, the highest impact levers were reportedly 'league tables' of national test and examination results and published inspections carried out by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). In higher education they were the UK Research Assessment Exercise, the National Student Survey, and anything involving 'money and markets'. Only one informant thought that manipulating leadership was a successful lever for change. The Research Assessment Exercise operates every few years (with its origins dating back to 1986) and conducts peer review of the quality of discipline by discipline research outputs and infrastructure, with the outcomes leading to differential core research funding (Lucas, 2006). The National Student Survey, established in 2005, asks all final year undergraduate students about teaching, assessment and feedback, academic support, organisation and management,

resources, personal development and overall satisfaction. The results are published by discipline and by institution in a league table listing. Thus leadership development appeared to have served the government aspiration to win the hearts and minds of senior staff as reformers less well than the hard levers had served the 'bottom line' interest of ministers in securing senior staff behavioural compliance.

7. LOCAL MEDIATION IN SUPPORT OF GLOBAL POSITIONING?

We conclude, first, that the professional culture of organisation leaders is not directly manipulable (Wallace *et al.*, 2011). School and university senior staff did not perceive that their educational and managerial values had been significantly influenced by any external leadership development experiences. The research therefore reinforces similar findings about significant, but often covert, resistance from other investigations of schools (Hoyle and Wallace, 2005) and universities (Strathern, 2000). That said, it is notable that a recent European study of changing research governance (Kehm and Lanzendorf, 2006; Leisyte, 2007) suggested that some partial accommodation has been made by academics to the increasing emphasis on research audit and emphasis on journal papers. Culture management through leadership development is slow at best, and unreliable as a soft policy lever. NLDBs represent a relatively weak control technology insofar as they operate through acculturation.

Second, the government and NLDB focus on leading public service organisations has contributed to the prevailing belief across the UK education system in transformational leadership for bringing about desired change, both nationally and globally. Yet it has also generated the unintended consequence of fostering some moderate mediation of (and thus change in) both the acculturation effort and educational reforms. Many of the latter were designed by policymakers to contribute towards the government's economic goals through developing a fit-for-economic-purpose workforce which can operate in a global context. Raising organisation leaders' awareness of their potential for envisioning desired change and proactively working to secure it may be acculturating them towards fully deploying their power to mediate according to their professional service values as transformational leaders. They selectively adapt reforms while also pursuing independent change agendas.

This mediatory approach is more marked in universities than in secondary schools. Universities are not only legally more autonomous, less dependent on public funding and so have more scope for independent change; they are also more directly engaged both in activity helping to position the UK as a global player in the knowledge economy and in their own global positioning relative to other universities in the UK, Europe and the world (King, 2009; Stensaker and Kehm, 2009). Through their efforts to position themselves globally (e.g. LFHE, 2006), universities are in effect autonomously pursuing government economic aims, while simultaneously retaining social and cultural purposes too, as success

in rankings and classifications brings status as well as international students and staff (Hazelkorn, 2010).

Third, such mediation was equally clearly limited. It still stood to benefit government global positioning interests in that it was consistent with and in some university instances also contributed directly towards the UK's capacity to compete in the global knowledge-based economy. Adapting reforms could have rendered them more viable in contingent local circumstances, and organisation leaders' independent change agendas congruent with the education reform thrust could have augmented it. Our evidence implies that such moderate mediation of government-driven education reforms which leadership development may have stimulated has, if anything, assisted the government's economic global positioning thrust to date.

The world financial crisis has pushed government global economic positioning towards retrenchment and contraction, creating conditions for a strong emergence from the current period of fiscal austerity. Projected public expenditure cuts in the UK of 30–40 per cent promise increased governmental reliance on hard levers for resource allocation and performance monitoring, to which service organisational leaders must respond. As mentioned earlier, there are signs that the soft lever of leadership development will also be used in an attempt to acculturate service organisation leaders towards endeavouring to achieve more with less. The evidence of this study suggests that it is unlikely to work.

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