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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the concept of a dual cultural and political perspective for analyzing interaction. It also illustrates how this dual perspective can explain how senior management teams (SMTs) operate in English secondary schools, in which senior faculty profess commitment to teamwork. Methodology included: (1) case studies of six secondary schools in two local education agencies (LEAs), which involved observations and interviews with SMT members, teachers, and the chair; and (2) 1-year longitudinal case studies in two of the schools, which involved observations of SMT meetings and members, interviews, and document analysis. Findings indicate that teamwork within the SMTs was hindered by the core contradiction between two sets of incompatible beliefs--the egalitarian culture of teamwork and the formal status hierarchy. The team approach is a "high gain, high strain" strategy, especially for headteachers, the formal leaders of SMTs. A positive outcome was increased job satisfaction; however, a major barrier was time management. The most critical factor for success was the headteacher's leadership style. Preparation and induction support for headteachers is recommended. One table is included. Contains 25 references. (LMI)

Team Approaches to Leadership in Secondary Schools

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TEAM APPROACHES TO LEADERSHIP IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Introduction

This paper has two purposes. The first is theoretical: to discuss the idea of a dual cultural and political perspective for analysing interaction as a way of overcoming certain limitations of employing either a cultural or political perspective alone. The second is to illustrate how this dual perspective gives purchase on several key findings of recently completed research exploring how, in the context of educational reform, senior management teams (SMTs) in English secondary schools operate where senior staff (faculty) profess a commitment to teamwork as their central strategy for managing the school. This research was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council from January 1991 to December 1992. (The research and its theoretical underpinnings are reported in detail in a new book: *Inside the SMT: Teamwork in Secondary School Management* by Mike Wallace and Valerie Hall, published by Paul Chapman.)

Our rationale for focusing on SMTs was to fill a significant gap in research knowledge. Virtually every secondary school in the country had an SMT, at least in name. Although ostensibly secondary school headteachers (principals) shared their leadership role, the little research which had addressed their practice (e.g. Weindling and Earley 1987; Torrington and Weightman 1989) suggested that there was wide variation in SMT structures and processes. A national survey of deputy heads carried out by a professional association (SHA 1992) found that only two thirds of respondents perceived that they were members of an effective team. Reasons given for ineffectiveness were 'carrying a passenger' - having to compensate for a colleague who was not contributing fully to the team, and lack of clarity about individual responsibilities. Little was known about how SMTs carried out their shared role since the existing research was not centrally concerned with teamwork, and it relied on the reports of SMT members uncorroborated by observation.

Much British research on school leadership is either atheoretical or is framed by a single perspective. Limitations of British and North American work on school leadership from either a cultural perspective (Nias et al 1989; Nias et al 1992; Deal 1985) or a political perspective (Ball 1987; Blase 1991) suggested that more explanatory power could be gained by combining them into a dual cultural and political perspective. This orientation could be employed to analyse interaction within teams. In the British context the position of legal authority in which headteachers are placed gives them more power than teachers to shape the SMT culture within the wider staff professional culture. Yet other SMT members also have power: their response to heads attempting to introduce teamwork may be to resist passively or actively, to cooperate with minimal commitment, or to collaborate with enthusiasm. A cultural and political perspective appeared to have greater potential for explaining the process of developing and changing a staff culture than either a cultural or a political perspective alone.

Leadership may be defined, following Louis and Miles (1990), as actions which set the course for maintaining the status quo and change within a team or an organization as a whole. These actions include making strategic plans, stimulating others act, creating conditions favourable to action, and monitoring progress. While headteachers are the formal leaders of SMTs, existing evidence implied that they use their resources to develop a team approach by sharing it to a greater or lesser extent with other SMT members. We wished to learn about shared leadership, and so to exclude schools identified in earlier research where there was not unified commitment to some form of sharing. In accordance with Larson and LaFasto (1989), we defined a *team* as a group of people with a jointly held goal whose achievement requires coordination between the activities of its members. We therefore restricted our enquiry to SMTs all of whose members professed a commitment to a team approach to school management.

CONTEXT

SMTs became commonplace only in the 1970s. Several factors appear to have influenced their emergence and rapid spread. First, the creation of large comprehensive schools of up to 2,000 pupils meant that secondary schools became more complex to manage. Heads had increasingly to rely on senior colleagues for support in carrying out their leadership role. Second, from the 1960s onwards teachers' professional culture came to include a strong value placed on consultation about and participation in making policy decisions that they would have to implement. Third, during the 1980s central government ministers not only expanded the provision of management training for heads and other senior staff but also made the assumption that school management had much to learn from practice in commerce and industry (Wallace and Hall 1989). Team approaches in the private sector were held in high regard, and training courses tended to extol the virtues of teamwork.

Finally, the 1990s saw the advent of unprecedented demands for coordination at school level to cope with the extensive programme of education reforms introduced by central government. School staff were now required to implement, more or less simultaneously, a range of major innovations. They included a national curriculum and its assessment; local (site based) management; open enrolment of pupils fostering competition between neighbouring schools; increased powers for school governors; provision of information on assessment results and truancy rates to inform parental choice; staff evaluation; the opportunity to become funded directly by the government and so opt out of local education authority (district) control; and privatised inspection arrangements. The combination of innovation overload and the range of innovations directly concerned with management meant that a coordinated response by senior staff was increasingly dictated if these and any local or site based innovations were to be implemented successfully (Wallace 1992).

Creating a team approach implied the superimposition of new working practices on a much longer established hierarchy of formal status linked to salary differentials and conditions of service, including the level of personal management responsibility (Wallace 1986). At the time of our research there were seven or eight status levels among teaching staff in secondary schools: class teachers, teachers with four or five grades of additional 'incentive allowance', deputy heads, and heads. This hierarchy was deeply embedded in the staff culture. To the extent that a team approach implied valuing the contribution of all SMT members equally, it cut across the traditional chain of command within the formal hierarchy.

FIELDWORK

Senior staff from two local education authorities were asked to suggest schools whose SMTs met the criterion of unified commitment to a team approach. An equal number of schools were selected with heads of either gender. The research was qualitative in design, and consisted of two phases of data collection and analysis. First, focus, interpretive case studies (Merriam 1988) were carried out in three schools in each local education authority. For each site, semistructured interviews were conducted with each SMT member, a small sample of other teaching staff with different levels of management responsibility, and the chair or deputy chair of governors. One SMT meeting was observed and relevant documents were surveyed.

Second, longitudinal case studies were carried out over a year in two of these schools. Criteria for their selection from the original sample included ensuring that there was one female head and one male head, and that one SMT was developing its approach to teamwork while the other was an established team. The main method was non-participant observation of formal meetings, including 47 SMT meetings and 31 other meetings (most of which were attended by one or more SMT members). Each SMT member was shadowed for at least half a day and interviewed onm two or three occasions. Interviews were conducted with a small sample of other staff and documents relating to meetings were collected.

Our interpretation of the findings was checked out at a feedback session for staff in each of the initial case study schools, and a session for the two SMTs in the second phase at the end of the fieldwork period. We integrated data analysis with collection, repeatedly refocusing the research according to the interim findings. Our approach was informed by the approach to qualitative data analysis developed by Miles and Huberman (1984), using matrices for cross-site analysis. The data set was also scanned for the expression of various themes. Tabulated display of data was less suited to this purpose, as it risked losing the complexity and contextual richness of particular events.

A Dual Perspective

The main theoretical task of the research was to develop and apply a dual perspective combining cultural and political concepts to gain a more thorough sociological understanding of interaction within organizations than had been achieved in recent studies of school management employing either a cultural or a political perspective. The former tends to overemphasise consensus resting on shared values; the latter tends to overemphasise conflict based on incompatible interests. Yet it seems plausible that the same interaction may contain elements of both conflict and consensus and that the relative weight of each is an empirical matter and should not be predetermined by the perspective adopted.

The limitation of each perspective is indicated by the way concepts from the alternative perspective creep into accounts from one or other perspective. For example, Nias and her colleagues focused on the 'culture of collaboration' among primary school staff. Yet they made use of political concepts in addressing the differential ability of headteachers to shape this culture. Ball analysed interaction between staff in terms of conflict, yet discussed shared norms that governed the public behaviour of SMT members - a cultural notion. Far from being incompatible ways of viewing the social world, concepts from both perspectives appeared to be required by researchers adhering to one or other perspective.

Even the increasing emphasis on collaborative uses of power (Blase 1991) does not get round the need for cultural concepts. Greenfield (1991) described the use of power by a principal to persuade other staff to share her beliefs and values. Yet the analysis underplayed how the principal's collaborative use of power related to the existing staff culture which accepted such actions by the principal as legitimate.

An initial assumption for our work was that interaction in SMTs entailed both cultural and political dimensions, following the conception of agency offered by Giddens (1976; 1984). There is evidence that women and men differ in their experience and behaviour within educational organisations (Shakeshaft 1987; Hall 1993). The cultural and political perspective was used to consider whether there were gender differences in beliefs and values and in the use of power.

Any perspective constitutes a metaphor which directs attention to one aspect of a phenomenon while diverting attention from others. It is becoming increasingly common to adopt a 'mixed metaphor' approach, employing two or more perspectives in turn to interpret organizational phenomena, so as to broaden the range of concepts used in analysis (e.g. Bolman and Deal 1991). We wished to test the possibility of employing a 'multiple metaphor', applying concepts from two or more perspectives at the same time. Giddens' analysis of agency addresses the negotiation of meaning and its relationship with norms of behaviour which, in turn, affect the use of power by individuals and groups to achieve particular interests. This conception guided the articulation of a range of concepts which constituted our dual metaphor: a cultural and political perspective for interpreting interaction within SMTs and between SMT members and others. We adopted a stipulative definition of each concept listed in Table 1. An obvious drawback of the approach was the danger of conceptual indigestion! Most concepts are in common usage in the study of school staff cultures and the study of micropolitics. However, our framework also includes ideas which may be less familiar.

(INSERT TABLE 1)

THE ROLE OF THE SMT

All six SMTs performed a similar role in different ways. As one deputy put it: 'The team approach is essentially to support and counsel the head and governors - the people where the buck stops.' Heads were in a pivotal position as both team leader and the top manager who worked most closely with the governing body. The SMTs set the framework for middle managers to carry out their responsibilities and, through a structure of formal meetings, also responded to initiatives from other staff or governors. The role consisted of making, implementing and evaluating major policies, coping with crises, and seeing to day to day school wide administration.

At its heart lay the making of a stream of policy decisions. SMT members monitored the work of the school and the external environment, each contributing to the overview which informed the decision making process. Other staff also contributed indirectly through the consultation procedures that usually preceded policy changes. The main forum for teamwork was the SMT meetings, occupying several hours each week and normally held behind closed doors in the head's office.

THE CULTURE OF TEAMWORK

The beliefs, values and associated norms of behaviour about working together that were shared among SMT members were dubbed the '*culture of teamwork*'. Some were potentially contradictory. A belief common to all six SMTs was that major decisions must be reached by achieving a working consensus. At the same time each member, irrespective of his or her formal status in the management hierarchy, had an equal right to state a sincerely held view. Team members valued both critical thinking as an antidote to 'groupthink' (over-readiness to compromise for the sake of group cohesion), and compromise where necessary for consensus. The culture of teamwork came under strain whenever SMT members held incompatible but sincerely held views and were unwilling to compromise. There was no simple 'meta-value' to which members could turn in seeking a resolution.

As formal leaders of their school, heads were unique among SMT members in having the authority to choose whether to adopt a team approach in the first place, usually when taking up post. They selected team members (although they also inherited deputies whose high status meant that they could not easily be excluded), and allocated members' individual management responsibilities. They worked continually, and often in subtle ways, to foster a culture of teamwork which would favour collaboration between SMT members, promote acceptance of their leadership of the team, and engender a commitment by all team members to taking collective responsibility for team decisions. One head provided a meal at the beginning of each SMT meeting, on the grounds that people who were sharing food would find it difficult to be argumentative and obstructive. All the heads attempted to demonstrate that they practised what they preached, expressing the norms and values that they wished colleagues to adopt. We observed several occasions where heads, finding themselves in a minority position during a debate, backed down and so exemplified the over-riding norm that individuals must compromise in order to achieve consensus.

POWER AS TRANSFORMATIVE CAPACITY

The conception of power we adopted avoids the presupposition that power is necessarily linked to conflicting interests. Giddens views power as '*transformative capacity*', the use of resources to achieve desired outcomes, whether in conflict or collaboration with others.

This conception contrasts markedly with the prevalent 'zero-sum' formulation (Dahl 1957) where power is defined as 'the ability to get someone to do what he or she would not

otherwise do'. Both definitions allow for each protagonist within a conflict situation to use resources in achieving interests that contradict those of others. In the zero-sum view, power tends to disappear when one protagonist gets someone else to do what she or he would also like to do. By contrast, transformative capacity implies that, where there is consensus, individuals may contribute to building the capacity for mutual empowerment through working together. *Synergy* - the achievement by the team as a whole of more than the aggregate of what members could achieve when working as individuals - was the goal of teamwork. Our observation of two SMTs suggested that synergy was achieved much of the time. We repeatedly witnessed mutual empowerment, as where all team members contributed ideas and expertise in working towards a major policy decision. The outcome was a more thoroughly thought through decision than individual SMT members could have made alone. Synergy rested on the collaborative use of power by like minded people.

Authority and Influence

We used the distinctions offered by Bacharach and Lawler (1980) between two types of power. Authority implies the use of resources to realise interests which is legitimated by beliefs and values about formal status, and includes the right to apply sanctions. Influence is the informal use of resources where there is no recourse to sanctions linked to authority. Bacharach and Lawler regard authority as an all or nothing affair: individuals have either overall or delegated authority. We found that authority within SMTs was more a matter of degree and occasionally subject to dispute.

The heads' conditions of service included overall responsibility, in consultation with governors, for the day to day running of the school. They delegated authority to other SMT members to contribute equally to the work of the team. The delegated authority of SMT members other than heads was clear cut in relation to their line responsibility for other staff, but the boundary had to be negotiated between their individual authority to make decisions within this responsibility and the authority of the team as a whole to have an input into such decisions. SMT members other than heads would occasionally check in SMT meetings whether a proposal for action within their personal management responsibility (say, for the school budget) needed SMT approval.

Authority shaded into influence where they used the authority delegated by the head to make an equal contribution to debate in advocating a proposal which ran counter to what the head favoured. Their action was legitimated by the parameters of their team membership set by the head, but their delegated authority was not accompanied by formal sanctions. They could, however, use influence to pose the threat of informal sanctions, such as withdrawing their commitment to teamwork.

Control of Interaction

Power is regarded by Giddens as a relationship. Interacting individuals are partly autonomous and partly dependent on each other, however asymmetrical their relationship. No-one has a monopoly on power, although it may be distributed unequally. While heads carried a unique level of authority based on their formal status as top manager in the organization to direct other SMT members' work, they certainly did not have exclusive control over their colleagues in practice. Withdrawal of commitment to the team, for example, was a potential sanction that any SMT member could apply. Giddens' notion of a multidirectional '*dialectic of control*' captures the way in which each party to interaction has some resources which may be used to influence others. The idea that the control of interaction follows a dialectic enabled us to explore how all parties made use of resources to realise their interests, according to their beliefs and values.

Control by heads or other SMT members was indeed far from absolute. Rather, each individual sought a measure of control by *delimiting the boundaries* of possible actions by others. Transgression was revealed when one person overstepped the boundary of acceptability for another. Only then did a struggle for control become evident as the

transgressor was brought swiftly back into line. Mostly, individuals operated well inside the bounds with which others were comfortable.

Boundary hopping was most likely to occur in team decision making where strongly held views differed and it proved difficult to reach a working consensus. In one instance, where disagreement prevailed, one deputy suggested that the group should take the unprecedented step of voting and making a majority decision. He was immediately challenged by an incentive allowance holder in the team, who referred back to the established norm of consensual decision making. Within the dialectic of control, she used her power to delimit the boundary of the deputy's actions through the resource of being able to refer to a key cultural norm. Other SMT members concurred and the deputy caved in, bowing to the norm of compromise for the sake of a working consensus.

Contradiction and Conflict

Teamwork within the SMTs contained a core *contradiction* between two sets of incompatible beliefs and values which mostly coexisted without conflict. The relatively egalitarian culture of teamwork was expressed in the day to day team process, where all members were encouraged to contribute ideas and expertise. This culture existed alongside the more longstanding acceptance of a formal status hierarchy within the wider staff culture, expressed in the distribution of individual management responsibilities among team members, and the ability of heads to create the conditions under which other SMT members could participate in fulfilling a shared leadership role. As long as interaction was based on one or other set of beliefs and values at any time, the potential for conflict remained latent. It arose wherever action according to opposing beliefs and values was taken within the same interaction.

A dilemma for heads, who as team leaders could be held externally accountable for the work of SMTs, was how far to commit themselves to fostering an equal contribution by their colleagues to decision making. They laid themselves open to the possibility that they might be outnumbered over a decision for which they alone would ultimately carry the can. Heads protected their interest in minimising the likelihood of their own disempowerment as an unintended consequence of empowering colleagues. They introduced safeguards which effectively delimited the actions of other SMT members. All six heads chaired the regular SMT meetings, set the agenda while inviting other members to contribute items, and retained the right to withdraw decisions from the SMT arena and make them unilaterally.

Withdrawing decisions was a last resort. While heads could legitimately pull rank according to their authority within the management hierarchy, to do so ran counter to the value of equal contribution to teamwork within the culture of teamwork they had inculcated. They ran the risk of bringing two contradictory values together in interaction. Some heads were reported as occasionally over-ruling the SMT. In several instances, the response of other SMT members was to accept the legitimacy of this action by switching to the belief in a management hierarchy, so removing the basis for conflict. In one school, SMT members other than the head resented this action and took the opportunity during a team training session to articulate their view to the head. In another, the head resisted pressure from some SMT colleagues to make a unilateral decision when impasse on a team decision had been reached. Two other members stated afterwards that, if he had done so, they would have lost faith in the team and would have withdrawn their goodwill.

For heads, an unintended consequence for heads of commitment to a team approach was that they were to varying degrees inhibited from using their authority where it meant transgressing the culture of teamwork which they had sponsored. Paradoxically, they stood to be more disempowered than their SMT colleagues if teamwork failed. For their credibility with other staff and school governors could suffer because they would be seen to have failed in their individual management responsibility as team leader, whereas other members' competence in carrying out their personal responsibility would not necessarily be in question. Adopting a team approach turned out to be a high risk strategy for heads:

synergy promised empowerment of all team members; yet its demise and reversion to a more hierarchical mode of operation would cost heads some of the empowerment that synergy gave them.

Manipulation and Micropolitics

The term micropolitics is often restricted to the covert use of power which is not legitimated by any formal position within an organization, following Hoyle's (1986) usage. While he acknowledges that micropolitics covers a continuum from above board management procedures, to 'almost a separate organizational world of illegitimate, self-interested manipulation', he confines description of micropolitical strategies mainly to those which are carried out behind the scenes. The conception of power we adopted implies that it is endemic to all interaction, yet we wished to make a distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative uses of power in interaction. We distinguished two dimensions underlying the notion of manipulation: the degree to which an action has a covert intention, and whether either party to interaction perceive an action as legitimate or illegitimate. We wished to allow for a grey area where the intention behind an action is not made explicit, but nor is it regarded as illegitimate. An action may therefore be overt and legitimate; manipulative because it is covert, yet still legitimate; or manipulative because it is illegitimate, whether overt or covert. It is also possible that the legitimacy of an action may be disputed by the different parties involved.

Within the SMTs, legitimacy of action was defined according to the beliefs, values and norms which made up the culture of teamwork. The heads attempted to create a climate which was conducive to collaboration by attending to the setting for team meetings, whether through the ritual of offering food or drink mentioned earlier, or by arranging chairs in a circle away from their desk. Their intention was not made explicit, yet the heads perceived it as a conscious and legitimate part of their work as team leader. We observed a variety of actions which could be classified as legitimate manipulation, but were able to identify very little in the way of the illegitimate manipulation which forms the focus of Hoyle's view of micropolitics.

The Influence of Gender

Our sample of heads was unrepresentative of the national picture, since merely one in five heads are women (DES 1992). Even in the three schools headed by women, men still outnumbered women among SMT members and other staff with middle management responsibility. We did not identify any gender related difference in behaviour in the approach to team leadership adopted by the heads. There was a wide variation in the level of awareness of gender issues connected with management but, although several women in the teams held 'caring' responsibilities such as the brief for pastoral care or staff development, there was no evidence that they had been selected because of any stereotypical assumptions about 'women's work'. Nor, despite the very different levels of awareness among SMT members, did we observe any direct discrimination.

There was evidence of gender related behaviour in the SMTs and the language used by respondents to describe their view of teamwork. The three woman heads included 'the need to protect against isolation' among their reasons for adopting a team approach. Men often referred to sports metaphors to highlight the value of teamwork. One woman commented on the initially rather foreign context of sporting imagery and banter with which she was confronted when joining an SMT consisting of five men: 'On the whole, women don't shout jokes at each other across the room, which is what men tend to do. I find it difficult to join that sort of repartee.'

Yet, in our study schools at least, the common belief in collaboration within the teams, coupled with mutual respect for individuals' competence, appeared to guide SMT members in working equitably together. While the experience of women and men may have been

different, the culture of teamwork helped to ensure equal treatment for those women who had successfully struggled to achieve the status of SMT membership.

Conclusion

Sharing the leadership of secondary schools proved to be a 'high gain, high strain' strategy, even in the favourable situations we studied. Where synergy was achieved the extent of the overview of the school sustained, the range of factors taken into account in making policy decisions, and the degree of coordination in supporting hard pressed staff with the implementation of multiple reforms were demonstrably greater than individual members could have achieved on their own. Respondents inside and outside the six SMTs were of the view that the teams were quite or very effective in carrying out their strategic role. Teamwork brought intrinsic benefits: job satisfaction was high where SMT members enjoyed the stimulation, camaraderie and mutual support that came with the development of a mature team with a strong culture of teamwork. We speculate that such team approaches to school leadership offer great potential for making a coherent and sophisticated response to national reforms and other changes, but our research indicates that, even where the going is good, they are difficult to bring off.

The major strain in the teams we studied was the large amount of SMT members' time that the approach could soak up. SMT meetings amounted to several hours each week, coupled with frequent informal communication between individual members. When shared decisions were difficult to reach additional time had to be found, often before the school day or in the evening. We also witnessed a few occasions where the culture of teamwork came under threat, even in the most well established SMT. The culture of teamwork was quite fragile and could be fragmented by a single major transgression, especially by the head. It seems likely that synergy is harder to achieve and sustain in schools where there is less commitment to teamwork by one or more SMT members than in our research schools.

The way heads went about creating, developing and leading their teams was the single most critical factor affecting the potential for synergy. The endemic contradiction between the relatively egalitarian culture required for teamwork and the differential authority connected with the management hierarchy was especially problematic for heads, because they were uniquely accountable for the work of the SMT. While ideally training should be available for all SMT members as a group, the top priority must be to see to the needs of heads, especially at the stage of preparing for a first headship and in the induction period afterwards.

Our cultural and political perspective enabled us to explore who had power to define, build or change a culture; how allegiance to often contradictory cultural norms affected the employment of power; and the interplay between culture and power in the relationship between interacting individuals and groups. We were able to grasp how the use of power and cultural norms were integral components of the same action. The perspective helped us to avoid the trap of prejudging whether cultural consensus or conflict of interests should be the bottom line explanation for interaction.

Our exploratory conceptualisation seems worthy of further development and application to other fields of enquiry, whether related to school leadership or to more generic research into teams outside the education sphere. The powerful analytic lens it provided suggests that this dual metaphor has promise as a way of interpreting interaction in a range of group settings.

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Table 1: Concepts within Cultural and Political Perspective

culture of teamwork	power
beliefs	resources
values	hierarchy
norms	interests
role	dialectic of control
status	authority
ritual	influence
consensus	conflict
	contradiction
	coalition