

Leadership and management in further education

[Business](#), [Management](#)



Abstract

The aim of this assignment is to carry out a study into the support that managers at College X receive to enable them to feel a sense of satisfaction and value in their contribution to the college and its performance.

The assignment reviews academic literature, on formal and informal mechanisms of support including induction, probation, performance management reviews, appraisal, and staff development together with informal methods such as peer support. The reviews, together with the use of primary research, seek to identify if the support offered to staff in college X enables them to feel as valued as the students, the education and training of whom is the core business of the institution.

Analysis of the primary research has revealed that the College Executive together with the Governing Body is committed to ensuring effective support is available to managers in an integrated and meaningful way. In so doing ensuring that the performance of the individual and the college continually develop and improve.

The main recommendations are that the performance management reviews and staff development support are firmly embedded into the college culture. This will ensure that strategic and operational level managers possess the skills required to effectively respond to the internal and, more importantly, external changes demanded of them whilst enabling them to develop a sense of achievement and job satisfaction.

1. Introduction

1.1 Rationale

Further Education Institutions (FEI) have been charged by Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) through DCELLS and Estyn to ensure and make as their main priority that effective learner support mechanisms are in place to enable the learner to learn and succeed in a nurturing, safe and supportive environment.

The research for this module will focus on the parity College X bestows on its managers, in respect of its responsibility to nurture and support them to achieve satisfaction in a similar way to its learners. In particular the use of formal and informal support mechanisms: their availability, deployment and level of effectiveness. The term 'mechanisms' is used to encompass the College policies and procedures that guide the manager and their teams to work effectively, the processes such as feedback on the performance of managers and the development and recognition required to create a sense of a job well done. According to Locke and Lathen (1976 cited in Tella, Ayeni & Popoola) 'job satisfaction is a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from appraisal of one's job or job experience'.

Estyn suggest that 'Effective college leadership also requires that staff at all levels with leadership and management roles make an important contribution and understand, and are committed to their job roles' (Estyn 2010 p 33) in order for this to happen the use of support, training and feedback are required. Support and feedback are 'essential to the working and survival of all regulatory mechanisms found throughout living and non-

living nature, and in man-made systems such as education system and economy' (Business Dictionary seen 23. 3. 2011) so should be key to the continual improvement in the institution.

1. 2Research Aims

To identify the effectiveness of the support mechanisms available in College X and how these impact on the performance of both strategic and operational level managers to positively increase their work effectiveness and sense of job satisfaction.

To analyse the informal and formal methods of feedback, recognition and reward available to all managers to meet the needs of the institution, their personal needs and that ' support and challenge them to do their best' (ESTYN 2010 p 35).

To examine the use of staff development as a tool for supporting continual improvements in the performance of strategic and operational managers and ultimately the performance of College X.

1. 3Research questions

What types of mechanisms are available in the college and to what extent managers are aware of and use these to give and receive support

To what extent does the senior management team create and maintain an environment that encourages individuals to feel valued by the institution

How does the use of feedback and recognition impact on the improvement of personal performance and accomplishment

How effective are staff development opportunities to support the strategic, operational and personal effectiveness of managers

1. 4 Research Objectives

To identify the types of support available to all strategic and operational managers and their effectiveness in creating job satisfaction.

To analyse the effectiveness of the performance feedback managers receive from their superiors.

To assess the level of understanding managers have about their individual performance and its contribution to the college performance.

To evaluate the effectiveness in the provision of support offered through the use of learning and development opportunities.

To identify the processes by which outstanding performance is recognised.

1. 5 Delimitations

This research is practice based and has used College X as the only institutional focus. Should other researchers wish to use the information or primary evidence questions, anonymity and confidentiality must be assured.

1. 6 Ethical Issues/Permission

Permission was sought and granted by the Deputy Principal who has overall strategic responsibility for all staff development, performance management and quality. Full consent was given by participants in respect of collecting evidence through primary sources. Anonymity and confidentiality was assured by the author and the use of an electronic survey ensured only information on the responses was collected and not that of the respondent. No ethical policies or institutional regulations have been breached during the research of this assignment.

2. Literature Review

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Whilst there are many management and psychological theories relating to job satisfaction and the concept of the positive effect of supportive relationships, the size of the body of literature available limits the author to use only some of the major theories as a starting point.

The identification of what support is and how it effects job satisfaction is key to the content of this investigation, Soonhee suggests ‘...that participative management that incorporates effective supervisory communications can enhance employees job satisfaction’ (Soonhee p1 seen 24. 3. 2011).

The use of management texts, theories, reports and web based materials together with College X’s policies has resulted in a greater understanding in the assumption that ‘...management support is seen as a key variable in the psychological well-being of employees.’ (Weinberg & Cooper 2007 p160) and therefore need effective mechanisms by which they can support and be supported. Support can be given formally through policies and, as suggested by Everard and Wilson, ‘ Recruitment, appraisal and training are three activities which should not be seen in isolation from each other but as part of a comprehensive approach to developing a proficient, well motivated and effective staff...’ (Everard & Wilson 2004 p 93). Informal and emotional support and feedback ‘ may increase individuals confidence in their ability to deal with the challenges that confront them’ (Wainwright & Calnan 2002 p 64) and ‘ a well done or an objective signed off as completed can enhance themotivationto perform well in the future’ (Torrington & Hall 1995 p318).

‘ More and more companies are realising that while they cannot offer a cradle to grave security blanket, they have a responsibility to create an

environment that nurtures the individual's ability to grow and thrive' (Couillart & Kelly 1995 p 255).

Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' addresses an individual's base needs such as safety and security. In a work environment these can be clean work areas, positive personal relationships and sufficient work time. The use of effective supervisory support can increase 'self esteem' needs through recognition, attention and confidence building. And the creation of 'self actualisation' can to some extent be achieved through the encouragement of individuals to be creative, demonstrate and utilise their innovativeness.

Oldham and Cummings in 1996 (cited in Soonhee p 1 seen 24. 3. 2011) '... found that employees produce the most creative outcomes when they work on complex, challenging jobs and are supervised in a supportive, non-controlling way'. To some extent Maslow's classifications are similar, to the hygiene and motivation factors of Fredrick Herzberg's two factor theory. As with Maslow, certain basic needs or Hygiene factors such as salary, status, working conditions, policies and psychological support have a direct effect on how a person functions within an institution. Herzberg's motivational factors are therefore '... those aspects of the job that make people want to perform and provide people with satisfaction e. g. achievement at work, recognition and promotion opportunities' (Kaur & Kainth p 7 seen 25. 3. 2011).

Recognition and reward should also be stimuli of job satisfaction, Steers and Porter in 1991 '...identified the distinction between Intrinsic and Extrinsic rewards – extrinsic arising from an individual's own sense of satisfaction and from financial benefits (pay, healthsupport) and intrinsic – between the

individual and system wide rewards such as pride in the organisation' (Steers and Porter cited in Gess 1994 p 87). However within the current financial Further Education (FE) environment, extrinsic factors may be limited by college accountability for the use of publicly funded finances. Couillart and Kelly state that 'whether held implicitly or explicitly, consciously or subconsciously each person has adopted a unique mental system of rewards. And whether informally consistent or not, that reward system is what motivates one on a day to day basis' (Couillart and Kelly 1995 p 241). This suggests that employees can develop extrinsic and intrinsic rewards through their own and their institutions Mission, Values and Vision.

Torrington and Hall suggest that 'planning the training, development and resources necessary for employees to achieve their objectives is imperative. Without this support it is unlikely that even the most determined employee will achieve the performance required' (Torrington & Hall 1995 p 317). Managers, like students need the opportunity to learn and become proficient in the acquisition of new skills. Therefore, a key function of management is to '... develop an ability to help individuals recognise their needs for development and facilitate the professional and personal development needed' (Murgatroyd & Morgan 1992 p 146). The use of formal support mechanisms such as Performance Management Reviews (PMR) enable line managers to guide their subordinates to undertake development however '... a systematic and structured approach to identifying individual needs implies that there should be an equally structured approach to responding to those needs' (O'Connell 2005 p 175).

Policies are another form of support available to the manager. Mullins suggests that they ‘...clarify the roles and responsibilities of managers and other members of staff and provide guidelines for managerial behaviour’ (Mullins 1985 p 301). Thus they enable a manager to be supported by institutional procedures and respond quickly without having to consult superiors as to the actions they take. This is a form of empowerment and implies a level of trust which has ‘ been identified as one of the keys to successful management and indeed positive relationships at work’ (Weinberg & Cooper 2007 p 162).

The use of informal methods of support can be equally successful in developing job satisfaction, ‘ supportive peer relationships at work are potentially more available to the individual and offer a number of benefits’ (Torrington & Hall 1995 p 429) including ‘... accessibility, empathy, organisational experience and proven task skills’ (Cromer 1989 cited in Torrington and Hall 1995 p 429). Peer and team meetings also allow managers ‘... to have their say in an impartially led session, thus permitting emotion to be expressed’ (Weinberg & Cooper 2007 p 170)

Summary

The use of formal and informal support enables the manager to work effectively as an individual, as part of a team and organisation. The need for College X to continue to develop responsive support mechanisms that parallel those given to learners is imperative. Senior managements need to ensure that whilst the support mechanisms such as appraisal and staff development are in place, the basic physical and psychological needs of security, safety and satisfaction are addressed.

3. Research Methodology

3. 1 Research design

The use of a case study based on the real working application in College X is the most effective method of undertaking this small scale research. It presents an opportunity to focus on relevant aspects of the formal and informal mechanisms used to support managers at both strategic and operational levels '... with a view to providing an in-depth account of events, relationships, experiences or processes' (Denscombe 1998 p 32). The research methodology centres on the involvement of managers and the mechanisms by which they are supported and how these affect levels of effective performance and job satisfaction.

The primary sources of evidence come from a focus group, semi-structured interviews and the use of an electronic survey. The use of the qualitative responses from the focus group and semi-structured interviews contribute to the main bulk of the findings. Each group or individual was interviewed in privacy without the line-manager present to allow for a free and frank discussion, was shown a diagram illustrating the interaction of support systems (Appendix 1). All responses are anonymous and no information from the research sources was distributed or discussed with other participants.

Focus Group

The use of a focus group with six middle/operational level managers enabled the views of both academic and functional areas across the college to be identified. The managers were specifically selected, as they all have very different job roles and specifications within the college, and were therefore

able to reflect on the different types of support they needed and received in respect of ' clarity of performance goals and standards, appropriate resources, guidance and support from the individual's manager...' (Torrington & Hall 1995 p 316). Each manager selected contributes to different facets of the strategic plan and where possible each has a different line manager so a possible correlation could be identified in respect of how management techniques and personality affect the support given - no formal measurement tools were used to identify this quantifiably. The participant's views were given freely and no prompts were given by the interviewer, this allowed for a free discussion to take place. The results of the discussion are noted in bullet point form in the appendices.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were held with the Human Resources (HR) officer; one of the two Vice Principals (VP); two of the four Faculty Directors (FD) and Clerk to the Corporation (CC) (Appendix 3). The findings from the interviews give an insight to the way support and job satisfaction is seen from the perspective of the Governing Body (GB) and how this is cascaded through the College Executive (CE) to the strategic and operational management levels. The questions used for the VP and FD were the same as those used in the focus group (Appendix 3), primarily to identify if there were any differences in the perception of support and job satisfaction across managerial levels.

The HR officer (HRO) interview (appendix 4) identified formal college policies and processes in respect of support and job satisfaction. The HRO is

currently tasked with reviewing the PMR and is therefore aware of some of the issues being researched.

Electronic questionnaire

The electronic survey (Appendix 5) was sent to twenty four cross college managers at operational and strategic levels after interviews to prevent prompting. Twenty responses (83%) were returned. As the group of respondents is small, actual numbers not percentages are used. The questions have been formulated as statements to identify the level of understanding felt by the participants, in relation to whether they agreed or disagreed; there is no neutral response as all participants have involvement with the college support mechanisms. The questions used were arranged in sequence from induction through to job satisfaction because '... order inconsistencies can confuse respondents and bias the results' (Mora 2010 p1).

Summary

The use and responses from the primary research methods enable the author to identify some of the positive aspects and potential issues of management support within College X and to what extent they have in providing a level of job satisfaction to its managers. This together with the literature review will enable a greater understanding of the mechanisms used to 'respond to the new needs of employees and the environmental changes of the organisation.....and that which executive leaders and managers should confront to facilitate participative management' (Soonhee seen 24. 3. 2011).

4. Findings

‘ When a Master governs, the people

are hardly aware that he exists.

Next, best is the leader who is loved.

Next, one who is feared.

The worst is one who is despised.

If you don’t trust the people, you make them untrustworthy.

The Master doesn’t talk, he acts.

When his work is done, the people say

“ Amazing: we did it, all by ourselves!”

(Lao Tzu, translated by Mitchell 1999 p16)

The findings of the primary research and literature review seek to identify if the support mechanisms used by the college do in fact enable its managers to gain a feeling of satisfaction or achievement in their job roles without impinging on their sense of autonomy.

Formal Support

College Policies

College policies available on the intranet should give managers instant support in respect of specific issues and procedures. However, to address them they are not always aware that policies exist or how to use them. When

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a policy is introduced training should be given which as one interviewee responded is “ meaningful and enables line managers to have a clear understanding of the support offered”, this in turn allows them to take ownership, and, for example, no middle managers interviewed were aware the college had a Stress Management Policy, a vital document which would have been useful as several of them have current issues with “ stressed staff”.

Induction and Probation

College X provides all managers with a range of policies and processes that should offer effective cycles of support through the ‘... three key aspects of effective performance – planning performance; supporting performance and reviewing performance...’ (Torrington & Hall 1995 p 317). Formal approaches to the giving of support provide a balance that encourages managers to feel confident and trusted to make the right choices within the confines of college procedures and ‘...yet underline the feeling that there is not a stigma in asking for help’ (O’Connell 2005 p174). When participants were asked about the formal processes of induction and probation the responses showed that although the processes were informative and well organised, there were limitations in the effectiveness of ensuring a new post holder felt adequately prepared to undertake their job effectively.

These responses may in part be due to the lack of formal standardisation in the way line managers (LM) conduct the induction of new staff. Each adapts the process to suit their sections perceived priorities. Some have very supportive methods e. g. one manager gives new staff a memory stick with guidance to policies and procedures and a list of frequently asked questions.

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HR arrange a termly focus group to help new appointees, and these according to the HRO could be more timely as they often fail to be of use especially to new managers who have to react to rapid change usually brought about by external demands. The personality of the LM also affects induction and probation, several of the interviewees said their LM had been extremely supportive and that a “ good working relationship had been established”, this was illustrated in the questionnaire responses to question 5.

The use of probation periods should allow an open platform for discussion however managers found difficulty discussing negative aspects partly because of fear of grievances being taken out against them. Where there is a conflict of interest, HR will try to match up managers who have the right approach for that subordinate.

Performance Management Reviews and Appraisal

PMR and appraisal should be the formal drivers of support in an institution, ‘ an effective appraisal should not produce surprise: it should be an honest summative statement ...’ (Tranter 2000 p 152) which ‘... offers a number of potential benefits to both the individual and the organisation’ (Mullins 1985 p 639). The PMR used in College X is currently under review as the GB feels there should more analysis of data and dovetailing of appraisal and staff development in the process, a view shared by several interviewees. The CE also recognise that the current provision/policy is not fit for purpose mainly because of the ‘ one for all’ documentation which does not reflect the range of activities, duties and responsibilities staff.

The questionnaire responses for 6 and 7 identify that PMR is not universally seen as a positive and constructive experience although it gives a positive sense of well being and satisfaction.

The current PMR is an annual process; all interviewees felt this was ineffective as it was “ difficult to remember and recognise performance across the year” and the idea of a phased or continual review based on both quantitative and qualitative data would be more effective. There were however concerns that constant review could result in the ‘ Big Brother’ effect and managers would lose their autonomy.

The HRO tasked with reviewing PMR suggested “ there is a need to incorporate appraisal and general performance into the Performance Policy”.

As a result of the suspension, managers felt they have had to self evaluate relying on externally set performance indicators; these include Tribal Benchmarking, External Audits, Quality Development Plan (QDP) and the Self Assessment Review (SAR). Formal feedback is essential, as suggested by Herzberg for increased motivation and ‘... for finding ways of challenging and renewing the work of a team so that it can continuously perform at increasingly high levels and transform its work from being acceptable to outstanding’ (Murgatroyd & Morgan 1992 p 151).

Therefore to ensure managers are challenged and perform effectively the development of a new policy tool is seen by the GB as key to ensuring adequate support is identified and appropriately given. The responses for question 12 indicate that almost half the respondents do not receive the

encouragement and challenge to explore learning and new skills that could positively influence their job satisfaction.

Appraisal is an effective method of communication, especially in relation to strategic objectives and innovation; it can act as a sounding board for managers to propose the changes needed for team and personal performance. Interviewees, especially at senior levels, felt this mechanism was important however the “lack of opportunities due to workloads could be frustrating because of the limited time to talk – this is not a criticism, just that everyone is busy”. All interviewees felt a sense of loss because of the suspension as they felt it was as important a means of support for their teams as it was for them. PMR enables the work and innovation of managers to be formally recognised, and the CE and GB encourage feedback of good practice to be formulated as resolutions which are rolled out across the college.

Middle managers (MM) questioned felt that although work was recognised by their LM but they felt disheartened when it was not always passed on the senior management. According to HR there should be a formal and consistent vehicle to notify staff of a job well done. The GB do send letters congratulating staff and commendations are minuted. O’Connell suggests ‘... we valued the ‘individual’ member of staff and thereby made him or her ‘feel valued’ (O’Connell 2005 p 157).

At a recent prize giving ceremony the Principal thanked staff publicly for their hard work as ‘senior management need to recognise, celebrate and

reward quality improvements' (Torrington & Hall 1995 p 303). This act made all managers feel proud to be a member of the college.

Staff Development and Training (SDT)

' The job holder is uniquely placed to understand his or her needs, although support and training are likely to be necessary...' (Wood, Barrington & Johnson cited in Goss 1994 p 75). All managers in the college participate in development and training much of which is self motivated. One interviewee commented that they had received more SDT in the first six months of working at College X than they did in their previous employment of twelve years. The GB fully support staff development and have taken the decision to keep the SDT budget high for 2010-11. However they want the college to develop a more synergised approach to SDT by linking the needs of the strategic plan directly to PMR. Question 9 implies that there does need to be more focus on SDT via the PMR, thus supporting the GB's strategic direction.

Interviewees of all levels stated that no external development opportunity was rejected however there appears to be little evidence of how reports on training effectiveness and its methods of utilisation within the college are recorded and distributed, one suggestion for this was the use of SharePoint.

SDT targets are set for each unit or school in the college. Most managers felt there was little initial training in operational management skills. It has been proposed that when the new PMR policy is introduced all new management appointees should have to undertake formal training in leadership and management skills, in line with Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) criteria.

Informal Support

The majority of interviewees agreed that “ their peers gave them a sense of companionship and support that really helped them in the college”, however others felt isolated due to the nature of the post. The introduction of a mentoring programme could alleviate this by ensuring all managers have the same level of security and collegiality. FDs felt they rarely meet as a group and when they did “ it tended to be due to crisis management, but it does allow us time to talk”. Informal and flexible support that was not rigidly monitored, i. e. an open door policy gave the majority of interviewees and questionnaire participants a sense of positivity and support.

All participants emphasised the need for Away Days – planned time when ‘... effective teams will stop working ... and review the quality of their ways of working (Murgatroyd & Morgan 1992 p 145) enabling those involved to reflect as a group on past performance and develop new initiatives. The concept was introduced by the CE as an opportunity to involve all managers in the development of the college strategic plan. The most recent event enabled the CE and GB to give managers a strong sense of psychological support and security in troubled transformational times and established a shared mission, vision and values (Appendix 6).

Summary

Through examining key issues it is evident that a well structured management support system is necessary in order for those involved to feel confident and valued and fulfil the performance targets set internally and externally. The development of the new PMR, appraisal and induction

processes together with a more integrated approach to SDT should enable managers to function to greater effect. The CE and GB are clearly aware of the need for proactive rather than reactive systems. The last staff satisfaction survey had a disappointing response of only 23.5%. Hence, the GB tasked the Principal, HR and Chair of the HR Committee to identify ways of increasing participation in future, as it is a key indicator of how the college is viewed as well a measure of job satisfaction amongst its employees.

Effective PMRs, development and training, attention to the emotional and physiological needs of being valued, trusted and empowered should therefore create '... confidence, loyalty and ultimately improved quality in the output of the employed'. (www. emeraldinsight. com seen 23. 3. 2011).

Conclusion

The aim of this assignment was to identify the effectiveness of the formal and informal support mechanisms available to all managers of college X. And if the psychological, social and development needs of employees are supported to the same extent as that of its students. From the results of the primary research it is evident that the available support does enable managers to carry out their day to day job roles. However this is not consistent across the college and the experiences of managers varies greatly, as one interviewee said " if you open me up I will have the college name through me like a stick of rock" illustrating the feeling of well being and genuine job satisfaction created by good support". However at the opposite end of the spectrum, another commented " there is no incentive -

when you do introduce something innovative someone higher usually takes the credit and gets recognition”.

Students have a plethora of support including; course tutors, learning coaches, counselling and financial support. To some extent this research does suggest that the majority of managers do have comparable support from their superiors, use of HR expertise and staff development. It is not sufficient to just have those resources, it is how their effectiveness contributes to the improvement in performance of the managers they support. Managers at all levels receive feedback on strategic or operational targets and indicators that is the priority although much of the feedback is ‘ad hoc’ and not recorded although many managers liked this informal approach. Ensuring feedback is regular and consistently applied coupled with finding the appropriate time and arena is proving to be a more difficult aspect to resolve.

The autonomy given to managers by the CE permits them to carry out their duties in a way they see fit, as one interviewee said “ I’m paid to do the job, not continually ask what is to be done”, another commented “ trust is absolutely a positive aspect, although there is no direction from my line manager, I feel empowered”. Trust and value in the individual’s judgement is seen by the majority of managers as implicit for the mature and positive work environment at college X.

The current support mechanisms are suggested by interviewees, as somewhat inadequate and outdated in respect of the feedback and development they need to undertake the roles and performance demanded

of them in the fast changing climate of FE. Fletcher suggests that ‘... all systems have a shelf life – perhaps changes are required to the system to renew interest and energy ...’ (Fletcher cited in Torrington & Hall p 327) and it is evident that the GB and CE are pro-actively committed to creating an environment where all supportive systems are integrated, have meaning in their relationships and recognise positive contributions from the individual employee and their effect on the performance of the institution as a whole.

4. Recommendations

At the end the focus group and interviews, all participants were asked what changes they would like implement so as to create a more supportive work environment which promotes job satisfaction. Many of these concur with the findings of the research undertaken.

Develop a system of mentoring and continue more effective induction and probation periods, which is timely and enables new managers to have first hand guidance and support in respect of college procedures and procedure thus enabling them to undertake their duties effectively from the very start. Improve lines of communication in respect of the recognition and distribution of good practice by developing greater use of peer groups so that managers of all levels do not work in isolation benefit from the support of others. And increase the use of ‘ away days’ to inform, give direction and feedback to strategic and operational managers thereby engaging everyone in the improvement of performance in college.

The anonymous data and findings collected for this research should, with the permission of all interview and questionnaire participants contribute to the

current review of the PMR and appraisal processes.

Introduce effective methods of development and training to ensure all managers are aware of and confident in the use of procedures identified in college policies, this has been identified by the GB as a priority.

Establish through a skills audit or needs analysis a programme of management training for the next academic year in relation to actual issues such as conflict training, people management and motivational skills thereby ensuring their subordinates are effectively supported and managed.

Develop a system that enables the information and knowledge gained from development and training events is available for circulation amongst managers and appropriate measures are introduced to ensure value for money and positive outcomes in performance.

Use the findings of this report to act as a foundation for further research and literature review in preparation for dissertation.

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