



## MODELS OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT: THE CASE OF A LANGUAGE TEACHING INSTITUTE

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This paper explores whether and how models of educational management are evident in the operations and organisational culture of a language teaching institute in a Southeast Asian country\*. The research followed the decision-making, planning and implementation processes at different levels of the institute over a three-month period. The purpose of the research was to ascertain: (1) whether any specific models of educational management manifested themselves; (2) which models were in evidence; and (3) what effect any identified models had on the operations and culture of the institute. Data were gathered through observations and interviews with relevant stakeholders within the institute. The findings show that while the formal model of educational management predominates, an eclectic mix of several models of educational management are evident in different departments and at different levels within the institute's organisational structure. The conclusion is the institute does not adhere to one particular model of educational management, but displays evidence of several models in operation simultaneously with a clear tendency for the Formal Model to dominate at the institutional level.

**Keywords:** Models of educational management, Organisational structure, Organisational culture, Language teaching.

\* For reasons of anonymity and confidentiality, the names of the institute and the country are not revealed in this paper.

### Introduction

Knowledge of models of educational management can provide managers of educational organisations with a better understanding of why they do what they do in managing their courses, departments and institutions. Moreover, recognising models of educational management contextualises decision making and helps to rationalise and explain actions that are taken. By reflecting on these models, managers can consider whether and to what extent they might need to reassess and change their management style for the betterment of their organisations. With these issues in mind, this paper will give an overview of the characteristics of several models of educational management. Then, it will describe some aspects of the management of a language teaching institute in a Southeast Asian country, and will identify which models of educational management are evident there. Finally, a brief conclusion will be drawn as to the nature of management within the institute in light of the models and evidence presented.

## **Some Models of Educational Management**

### **The Formal Model**

The Formal Model (Bush, 2003) or Classical Model (Everard, Morris and Wilson, 2004) is characterised by a high degree of job specialisation and is highly centralised. It has a fixed command structure, rigid hierarchy, top-down communication, firm control, strict procedures and a dogmatic approach (Everard, Morris and Wilson, 2004). People within the organisation have clearly defined positions, which influence professional relationships and perpetuate the status quo. Those at the top of the hierarchy have primacy in setting goals, making decisions and formulating policy (Bush, 2003). Objectives are set at the institutional level, with staff support taken as axiomatic.

The Formal Model has been very influential since the development of theories in educational management (Bush, 2003). With its clearly defined structure and top-down leadership, it is considered to be central to the notion of effective management and many schools and language teaching organisations have adopted, adapted and built on this model to improve efficiency of the management process. While alternative models have been in vogue at various times, the Formal Model remains widespread throughout a range of educational management systems.

### **The Collegial Model**

The Collegial Model (Bush, 2003) shares many characteristics with Everard, Morris and Wilson's, (2004) Humanistic Model in that both are based on the assumption that agreement can be reached when the staff shares common values and plays an active role in decision making. Policies emerge by consensus via committees and informal groups, in which respect is given to the needs, ideas and opinions of all participants. It is proposed that all interested parties are likely to act rationally according to how they perceive any given situation (Everard, Morris and Wilson, 2004). This model requires an organisational structure which is largely decentralised, has flexible procedures and multi-directional communication (Everard, Morris and Wilson, 2004): thus, providing for the widespread distribution of influence, rather than it being concentrated in the hands of senior management.

However, while many believe that the Collegial Model and other participative approaches 'represent the most appropriate means of managing educational institutions' (Bush, 2003, p.70), others have argued that it is rather idealistic and may lead to a lack of control and direction on the part of management. Therefore, due to its flexible nature, those who attempt to adopt the Collegial Model may fail to implement it fully or effectively for fear of the organisation becoming akin to a rudderless ship.

### **The Political Model**

Whereas the Collegial Model emphasizes mutuality and consensus, the Political Model (Bush, 2003) is built upon the notion that decisions are likely to be made according to the power relationships of the participants. In this model, departments, committees and informal groups promote their own interests and objectives, thus producing an environment in which conflict is the primary characteristic. Such organisations are often dominated by those groups or individuals who are able to promote their own interests above those of their colleagues (Bush, 2003).

The Political Model equates with the Contingency Theory described by Everard, Morris and Wilson (2004) to the extent that, in seeking to secure their own self-interests, departments and individuals focus increasingly in creating a niche and a distinctive identity within the organisation. Over time, this process will result in a culture of conflict, in which the interests of the individual or department take primacy over those of the wider organisation. In this model, the head of the organisation assumes the role of overlord and mediator between managers of various departments. Each manager is heavily involved in bargaining and negotiating in order to ensure effective decision-making. This requires the manager to have a deep

understanding of the power relationships within the organisation. If this is to be achieved, a culture of mutual trust and respect must be developed and maintained between the conflicting parties within the organisation.

### **The Cultural Model**

Advocates of the Cultural Model suggest that the informal norms and rituals which characterise organisations may be equally important as the formal structures when attempting to understand management processes within them (Bush, 2003). In order to have an effective system, managers need to understand and attempt to influence the collective values held by those working in the organisation. This is particularly important for new management who may not be in tune with the culture specific to the organisation in question. By understanding and influencing values so that they become closer to, if not identical with, their own beliefs (Bush, 2003), managers can affect positively the changes they wish to bring about. For effective implementation of change, staff must feel part of the innovation. This requires the manager to utilise the existing culture or develop new attitudes to give staff a sense of partnership in change. Managers are more likely to gain staff support for change by adopting the Cultural Model rather than imposing it via top-down processes, as the Formal Model suggests.

### **The Ambiguity Model**

Whilst the models discussed above assume that management of educational organisations is planned and systematic, the Ambiguity Model (Bush, 2003) takes into account the fact that organisations are often faced with unpredictable problems which may not be solved through a rational process. Managers skills in making rational choices depend on whether or not they are able to select an option from a range of alternatives which have been prepared to deal with predictable situations (Bush, 2003). However, in fact, managers are often faced with unforeseen circumstances presented by the internal and external environment for which they are unprepared. These pressures may require decisions to be made which appear to be irrational when seen in the context of an organisation's long-term objectives. It is this 'mix of rational and anarchic processes' (Bush, 2003, p.127) which defines the Ambiguity Model. It is a model which offers little guidance for managers, but one which does help to explain the sometimes contradictory, ambiguous, and seemingly irrational actions taken by management on occasion.

Having briefly reviewed some of the major models of educational management, this paper will now move to a brief description of the research methods followed by presentation of the findings and discussion of the management of a language teaching institute in a Southeast Asian country. It will be seen that several models coexist in this organisation, each according to the level at which it appears to be the most suitable or compatible with the style and experience of the manager.

### **Methods**

The research followed the decision-making, English language teaching course planning and implementation processes at different levels of the institute over a three-month period. Data were gathered through observations of meetings and discussions between personnel at different levels of the organisation. Interviews with relevant stakeholders within the institute were conducted with willing volunteers who provided informed consent. Under the terms agreed for conducting the study, any information that could be used to identify the institute or individuals within it has been withheld.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The language teaching institute that is the focus of this research was established in the 1960s to serve as a centre for English Language teaching for language learners and training for English Language teachers

both at home and from across Southeast Asia. However, after several years, this purpose was expanded to cater to the teaching and learning of Southeast Asian languages in addition to English. Analysis of the gathered data indicates clearly that several models of educational management are in evidence concurrently within the institute and that these models are to be found at three distinct levels: institutional, departmental and course. Management at each of these levels is discussed below.

### **At the Institutional Level**

The management structure and organisational culture of the institute provide ample evidence that policy control and decision making are centralised in the position of the Director. This role mirrors that of a CEO in a commercial enterprise in that all major (and in the case of this institute, often minor) decisions must be approved by the Director. The Director, Deputy Director and Assistant Director are all appointed by the local Ministry of Education. The holders of these positions are former secondary school principals who have worked in the formal education system for most of their professional lives. As such, they are part of, and owe their success to, the hierarchical system that exists within the Ministry of Education. This previous experience has evidently led them to assume a particular approach to the management of the institute. It is also interesting to note that, although they are leading a language teaching institute, the current holders of the positions at this high level of management are not trained nor qualified language teachers.

Decision making, management and the management of change are conducted in a top-down direction. Weekly Executive Committee (ExCo) (comprising the Director, Deputy and Assistant Directors, and Heads of Department) meetings are held with the purpose of informing department heads what decisions have been made with regard to the development and operation of the institute's activities. Department heads may give comments, but these rarely conflict with the ideas, opinions and options presented by the Director, whose perceived and actual position as an authoritarian figure is reflected in the current holder's management style. Thus, at this level there exists a rigid, formal management structure, which exhibits the characteristics of an autocratic and authoritarian nature. This approach to management is prevalent throughout the wider society, and in particular in the government and statutory bodies. This Formal Model is, therefore, the norm at the institutional level in this Southeast Asian country.

Once decisions have been made and presented to the ExCo members, it is their responsibility to inform and persuade their respective departmental staff that the policy, action or change is necessary for the good of the institute. The implementation of policy, action and change is not through the process of 'interaction, dialogue, feedback, modifying objectives, recycling plans, coping with mixed feelings and values' described by Everard, Morris and Wilson (2004, p.220), but rather one in which change is presented as a *fait accompli*. The lack of channels for staff input as in a bottom-up model is lamented by many of the participants in this study who feel it leads to frustration and a sense of unrecognised worth on the part of many non-managerial staff. Reluctance on the part of the ExCo members to represent to the Director the feelings of their staff with regard to new policies and practices has resulted in a staff culture in which personnel view all change simply as change rather than as innovation: that is, inconvenience rather than improvement. Consequently, there has developed a resentment of change which might otherwise, with more effective and open communication channels, have been acceptable (Stephenson, 1994). In essence, staff at this language teaching institute comply with policy and change out of obedience to, rather than in support of or respect for, management.

The highly stratified and inflexible management system at the institutional level is a reflection of the models and methods by which most organisations in this country are managed. At the institutional level, this management structure and organisational culture of the institute is determined by several factors including (1) the Director, and the Deputy and Assistant Directors are appointed externally by the local Ministry of Education; (2) the senior managers are all local personnel who have been immersed in Formal management models for the whole of their working lives; and (3) it is not part of the cultural norms to

question or challenge the decisions of those senior in age and in positions of authority. While this situation is tolerated by local staff, the significant number of the expatriate teaching staff and support personnel often feel frustrated at the lack of communication and seeming lack of respect for their position as members of the institute. This is particularly true of those who have worked in societies where more open and less formal models of educational management are the norm.

### **At the Departmental Level**

Although the institute in this study comprises several departments, the focus of research was on the its two English language teaching departments, which for the purposes of this paper will be called Dept A and Dept B. The majority of teaching staff in both departments are expatriate speakers of English from Australia, Britain, Canada, New Zealand and the USA.

Dept A was originally established with the objective of providing English language teacher education and conducting research into the teaching of English language within Southeast Asia. It is staffed by seven language specialists, two of whom hold the posts of Head and Deputy Head, in addition to one full-time and five part-time lecturers. Visiting specialists are also invited to spend periods of up to six months at the institute. Specialists are holders of doctoral degrees while lecturers hold masters degrees. The Head of Dept A is an expatriate who has lived in the country for approximately twenty years. He is the first expatriate to hold this post.

Dept B was set up in the 1980s to provide English language proficiency courses. It has eight full-time teaching staff including the Director of Studies. It also has a pool of approximately twenty part-time instructors, most of whom conduct English courses for secondary schools. All the teaching staff hold diplomas or masters degrees in TESOL, TEFL or Applied Linguistics. The Manager of Dept B is a former local secondary school teacher with experience in a non-educational management context.

In recent years, the distinction between the two departments has become less clearly defined than at their inception, to the extent that Dept A now conducts proficiency courses in addition to its teacher training role, while Dept B also conducts teacher training courses. Whereas in the past, the objectives, responsibilities and scope of operations were clearly defined and established for both departments, there is now no obvious delineation between them. This situation has resulted in the emergence of a heated rivalry. In an attempt to show that Dept B has achieved parity in status and reputation with the longer established Dept A, the Manager of Dept B insists on being addressed as 'Manager and Head' of the department. The situation is now thus: two almost identical departments, each with a 'Head', both performing a similar function in terms of English teaching and English language teacher-training.

In the past, courses were easily assigned by the Director of the institute to the respective departments. However, the recent blurring of the lines of responsibility has meant that Departments A and B have become competitors for courses. This competition often involves horse trading to ensure that both departments get what they perceive to be the prestigious courses, which are generously funded by national and international donors, along with the more mundane and less profitable assignments. ExCo meetings and course planning meetings tend to become negotiating sessions in which internal rivalries are played out with the Director handing out the spoils to the victor. On reporting back to staff after ExCo meetings, the Manager of Dept B will often claim that courses, which had been earmarked for his department, were 'hijacked' by Dept A. This rivalry means that much of the departmental Heads' time is spent on domestic politics rather than on supporting the needs of learners and teachers.

In order to impress the Director and promote the image of Dept B, the Manager accepts course assignments at very short notice, which often leaves the teaching staff very little time to prepare a syllabus and materials. Such decisions are based on the Manager's perceived need to out-perform Dept A. However, these decisions appear to be pedagogically unsound and fail to take account of the needs of the teaching staff and the prospective course participants. Therefore, the manager of Dept B finds himself caught between the perceived need to protect his department, the organisational pressure to impress senior management, and the duty to provide professionally planned and conducted English language courses.

Moreover, by initiating and perpetuating inter-departmental rivalry, the Heads may score points off each other, but they do so by placing unnecessary demands on the teaching staff of their respective departments.

### **At the Course Level**

Once a course has been assigned to a specific department, the development and delivery of that course is largely based on autonomous decisions made within the department. At this stage, senior management plays a minimal or non-existent role. This leaves the Head of each department to focus on the leadership aspects of his position by assigning staff the roles of course developer, materials designer and teacher. In both Departments A and B the responsibilities for the development and design of courses is given to specialists and lecturers who (1) are deemed the most suitable, based on experience; (2) are available to undertake the necessary work; and (3) have the ability to coordinate and manage teaching teams and learners. The Deputy Head of Dept A assists the Head in assigning course design and teaching duties, while the Director of Studies performs a similar role in Dept B. It is also their responsibility to try to ensure that the Heads provide the details necessary for an effective needs analysis prior to each course. This, however, often proves to be an area of conflict in Dept B, in that the manager is often reluctant to provide information or allow lecturers direct access to proposed learners and sponsors for fear of courses being 'hijacked' by Dept A. Once more, inter-departmental political considerations outweigh the pedagogical necessities of understanding as much as possible about prospective learners' existent and expected language skills before embarking on course design.

However, once courses have been assigned to the teaching staff, decision making is conducted via consultation and, in some instances, a co-determinant approach is taken Everard, Morris and Wilson (2004). For example, course content is discussed with, and often determined by, the specialists and lecturers involved in teaching a particular course. Rivalry gives way to cooperation and collegiality replaces formality. It is at this point when the management aspect of the teaching staff's work begins to be fully focused on the task of English language teaching.

The general consensus among the teaching staff of both Departments A and B is that they prefer not to be involved in the formal and political levels of management within the institute. As far as possible, most are content to remain in the relatively autonomous nether regions rather than in the higher echelons of management. This view is succinctly expressed by Handy and Aitken (1986) with their conclusion that teachers 'are teachers first and managers when they have to be, because managing is clearly a disruptive occupation if you have something else to do' (p.36).

### **Conclusion**

The five general models of educational management presented in this paper are a selection from a multitude of theories that have been advanced. However, it is evident that no single model or theory can describe or explain the complete nature of management in the language teaching institute that was the focus of this study. As this case has shown, the notion that one model can permeate all levels of an educational organisation is invalid, in that differences and conflicts exist at the institutional, departmental and course levels. This institute displays an eclectic mix of the Collegial Model at the course level, the Political Model at the departmental level, and the Cultural and Formal Models at the institutional level. It would appear that previous experience and cultural internalisation with regard to social and professional hierarchy play a large role in the management style of individuals at various levels within the institute. The fact that senior management positions are held by local personnel who have come from the formal education system can explain to some extent the dominance of the Formal Model in this institute: as top-down models of management are prevalent throughout society in this Southeast Asian country, and are, therefore, inextricably linked to the cultural notion of effective management. As such, the models of

educational management identified in this language teaching institute are undoubtedly a reflection of organisational management in the wider society.

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