

Journal Article

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Not All Managers Are Managerial: A Self-Evaluation of Women Middle-Managers' Experiences in a UK University

The focus of this small-scale self-evaluation is the implementation of a new middle management role in a post-92 UK university. A realist appreciative inquiry was undertaken with five women who had been promoted to a middle-management role 18 months prior to the inquiry. This evaluation for knowledge offered an opportunity to reflect on experiences in practice and sought to understand the experiences of the women in this role and how they cope with the challenges middle-management brings. Particular challenges (instability-generating) accorded with existing literature and included: lack of role clarity, lack of pre-preparation for management role, colleagues' views of management, including perceptions of women in management roles and malicious intent of managed academics in rare cases. Supportive factors (provisional stability-generating) included: personal resilience, informal peer support, external support and reflection. The co-evaluators offered reflections for the future from this co evaluation. These suggest that training may contribute to provisional-stability in role and should be considered for new entrants to middle-management. The alternative construct of humanistic management is proposed as a way of understanding these women's values-based decision-making practices in complex situations.

Keywords: women; middle-management; managerialism; humanistic management; higher education

### **Introduction**

My initial interest in the experience of academic middle-managers sprang from my personal experience of being in such a role. I was promoted to this role from a senior lectureship in counselling. My preference for theory-informed practice led to curiosity as to whether individuals in middle-management roles had personal theories of how to practice in their roles and whether these micro-theories related to their prior discipline, to theories of change, theories of management or other midrange theories. The group of co-evaluators are all women. I approached the study from a humanistic and critical realist perspective. Under critical realism, the situation is seen as more complex than attributing causality to gender.

This paper begins with a situating literature review which outlines the context in which universities and the middle-managers within them operate. The realist methodology and methods utilising appreciate inquiry (AI) are then outlined. The findings section utilises quotations from interviews to synthesise the findings of the evaluation with the pertinent literature. This includes experiences that contributed to generating resilience and provisional-stabilities and those that were instability

generating. Reflections for the future are offered. Finally, the conclusions regarding the need for training and challenging perceptions of middle-management as new-managerialist are presented.

### **Situating Literature**

Universities are situated within complex economic and political contexts, and it has been proposed that they have become 'hybrid organisations' (Whitchurch and Gordon, 2010; Winter, 2017) in response to increasing public pressure to become more efficient and business-like, whilst maintaining effective professional outcomes and a pro-social focus (Winter, 2017, 123). Deem (1998, 53) suggests "the term 'new-managerialism' is generally used to refer to the adoption by public sector organisations of organisational forms, technologies, management practices and values more commonly found in the private business sector". There is a profound mistrust and misunderstanding of the role of business which appears to be grounded in the view that business occupies the moral low ground and is unethical and amoral (Freeman, 2018).

### **Humanistic management**

A humanist ideology is counter to neoliberalist and economistic conceptions of management: it rejects the mechanistic and reductionist approach (Dierksmeier, 2016). It recognises the agential nature of managers who make values-based decisions in complex circumstances in the belief that market economies hold a substantial potential for human development and that economic success can contribute to the dignity and well-being of all (Pirson, 2016). Humanistic management should consider the values which people ascribe to themselves (Dierksmeier, 2016, 15). This requires managers to be reflective and psychologically mature and flexible in their ability to consider the perspectives of others (Winter, 2017; Rogers, 1969). This includes balancing the different and sometimes competing perspectives of colleagues about the 'right' decision to make. It is proposed that "management following this path cannot take any other primary form than that of dialogue" (Kostera, 2016, 51).

University leaders often stress the pro-social benefits that universities offer through education and research (Winter, 2017). It is important that there is congruence (alignment) between what an organisation states that 'it is' and the identities and practices of those who collectively 'are' the

organisation (Winter, 2017). It is important because a factor in the development of psychological distress is the expectation to behave contra to one's personal values (Rogers, 1957). Deem (1998, 54) makes the point that "some women academic managers in HE may have different strategies for and conceptions of academic management ... not necessarily best explained by new-managerialism". Whilst she suggests that soft practices are often associated with women managers, she also notes that the extent to which managers will adopt hard or soft practices depends on their individual values as well as their gender (Deem, 1998, 53). This is reiterated by Winter (2017) who proposes that the ability to understand the perspectives of others is exhibited by skilful managers, but does not propose that this is a solely feminine attribute. It has also been stressed that hard management practices are required when colleagues do not behave in ways that meet the standards expected of professionalism afforded through autonomy (Hellowell and Hancock, 2001). Therefore, to be effective, managers need to be able to perform both aspects well. In humanistic terms this means challenging behaviours that are counter to dignity and well-being. Deem (1998, 52) highlights that the romantic view of a collegial and autonomous past in academia is one that may not be quite so appealing to women, since it was "an elite system that often excluded women" (Clegg and McAuley, 2005, 31). Bush (1995, 2) defines organisational collegiality as determining policy and making decisions "through a process of discussion leading to consensus. Power is shared among some or all members of the organisation who are thought to have a mutual understanding of the objectives of the organisation". It seems likely that 'some' rather than 'all' voices will be used or heard, something that women may be especially attuned to as they are typically under-represented at management level.

### **The role of middle-manager**

The role of manager in educational contexts is often considered rather pejoratively (Briggs, 2007, 476). However, there is a relative paucity of literature considering this from the perspective of middle-managers. Saunders and Sin's (2015, 140) notable exception gets to the crux of the issue facing academic middle-managers:

They embody the tension between the managerialism inherent in running a Higher Education Institution and the traditional values of collegiality and academic freedom.

They highlight some key issues that the middle-managers in their study faced, stating that similar

challenges were noted by Preston and Price (2012). These included lack of empowerment; lack of financial control in relation to decisions they were responsible for taking and accountable for the effects of, summed up by one of their participants “I’m responsible for everything but not necessarily in control of it” (Saunders and Sin, 2015, 145). Participants also felt constrained by university policies and procedures and felt that they lacked training when taking on a management role.

Preston and Price further noted the issue of difficult conversations, especially when moving between roles of peer and manager and the difficulty of balancing different aspects of the role. They note a particular challenge of moving between different communities of practice and different discourses as well as a lack of understanding of the concept of, as one participant in their study put it “what management was” (2012, 414). Floyd and Dimmick (2011) reported on the negative impact being a head of department had on individuals’ home lives.

### **Professionalism**

Academics may consider themselves as belonging to a profession as a teacher and researcher, as well as belonging to a profession related to their discipline. They may consider themselves to have hybrid professional identities (Winter, 2017). In the case of academic managers, identity as a manager may include a personal micro-theory of the role (Briggs, 2007). Balancing the expectations of managed academics and senior managers, along with their own values, requires perspective taking (Winter, 2017). This can include adopting the language of different groups, in order to demonstrate understanding of different perspectives. The fact that a manager can converse in new-managerial ‘speak’ should not be construed as meaning they uncritically accept or act according to its underlying ideology (Deem and Brehony, 2005). Becoming new-managerialist would mean casting off any underlying pro-social values that they are seen to have possessed when beginning academic roles (Winter, 2017; Floyd, 2016). Winter (2017, 13) suggests that

“values are deep-seated and difficult to change”.

Kolsaker (2008) indicates that the situation between managers and academics is a relational one, where all parties constantly reconstitute themselves in relation to their own perceptions and their

environment. She suggests that further research is needed to understand these relational aspects which underpin “a willingness to tolerate managerialist modes of governance provided autonomous niches can be protected” (Kolsaker, 2008, 513). A humanistic view of management argues that the manager’s role is to “arrange the organisational conditions and methods so that people can achieve their own goals by also furthering the jointly defined goals of the organisation” (Rogers, 1969, 208). Perhaps, humanistic management practices that genuinely value the autonomy of colleagues contribute to acceptance of institutional requirements.

were women and began their roles concurrently. They had been in role for 18 months at the time of the evaluation.

## **Methodology**

### **Philosophical stance**

I take the critical realist position that there are multiple stratified layers of reality and that management in organisations is complex. This evaluation sought a micro view of this reality, from the perspective of women experiencing being a middle-manager in a university for the first time.

### **Planning and rationale**

The RUFDATA framework (Saunders, 2000) is a tool to aid reflexive decision making when planning and designing an evaluation. As a novice evaluator, it was helpful in ensuring that the aspects of evaluation which the acronym refers to were addressed. These are: reasons and purposes, use, foci, data, analysis, time, and agency (audience). Self-evaluation is defined by Saunders (2011, 13) as

“practitioners participating in evaluation to inform their own practice”.

In this case, the aim was to facilitate reflection on experiences of managing organisational change in middle-management roles.

As a novice evaluator working independently in a university setting I aimed to “generate understanding and explanation” (Chelimsky, 1996, 102). Utilising appreciative inquiry enabled learning for co-evaluators from the process of evaluation (Patton, 2011) and offered the opportunity

to move knowledge from tacit (theory-in-use) awareness of personal micro-theories in action (Argyris and Schon, 1974). Knowledge evaluations do not always lead to use (Chelimsky, 1996). However, the appreciative inquiry methodology produced reflections for the future which offer utility for the co-evaluators, and potentially for the institution involved and beyond. Here the boundary between evaluation and research is blurred in that the findings may offer potential for contributing to research knowledge in the area of management practice in HE.

## **Method**

Ethical approval for the evaluation was gained from Lancaster University department of educational research. The data were collected via short semi-structured interviews which were audio recorded. These ranged from 40 to 70 min and I transcribed them in full. Information that could lead to the co-evaluator being identified was removed for reasons of anonymity.

As a co-evaluator, I arranged for a peer to collect data from me. Transcripts were provided to co-evaluators for checking. Once the resulting paper was complete, it was shared with the co-evaluators in order that they could voice their opinion and suggest any changes. No one requested any amendments, and positive comments were made as to the usefulness and accuracy of my understanding.

An interview guide (available in Table 1) was developed utilising a template from Cooperrider et al. (2008). The focus of the questions was on developing understanding of how personal theories in use (Argyris and Schon, 1974) and midrange theories from prior disciplines contributed to the development of provisional stabilities (as resilience). It also sought to uncover experiences that led to tensions which were instability-generating. The interviews took place at the work place of the participants, in an agreed private location. Literature to inform the evaluation was acquired using the Onesearch tool at Lancaster University library. The terms “middle-managers and higher education” and “provisional-stabilities” informed the search.

## **Data Analysis and Presentation**

The questions asked provided thick data regarding the experiences of the participants. Transcribing the interviews myself enabled me to purposively listen for themes in the narrative of participants.

Analysis of the data was a reflexive and retroductive process.

### **Table 1 Appreciative inquiry interview guide**

Do personal or mid-range theories assist in developing provisional stabilities and resilience to change?

Introduction to the interview: I'm doing my PhD in higher education This has introduced me to things about change in higher education I wasn't aware of before. It has got me thinking about how we cope with change when we aren't necessarily pre-prepared for how to cope with ways that change is treated in different contexts. I'm interested in how you've experienced the effects of your associate head role (and coped with it).

#### Questions:

Why did you want to take the role of associate head?

What do you want to achieve?

What understanding of change did you come into the role that you've drawn on to help you manage difficulties? Do you always manage to apply these to practice?

What has been most surprising to you about people reactions to the change the role has brought?

What have you drawn on to cope with that?

What are the really positive things (without being humble) that you bring to this role?

If you were preparing staff to take on a role like this what would you want to have in place? Do you think

it would be helpful to learn about theories of change that apply to organisations/HE?

The interviews spanned three weeks in 2017. I was able to transcribe some before undertaking the next. I re-read the transcripts several times. This enabled the development of the themes into grids relating to stratified layers reflecting microtheories, mid-range theories and then drawing out the distinction between stability-generating and instability-generating experiences which are presented in the findings section below.

The question: Do personal or mid-range theories assist in developing provisional-stabilities and resilience to change? was at the heart of the evaluation.

The analysis therefore took theory as its starting point. By this, I mean that in contrast to grounded theory where "theory is the result, rather than the precondition of research" (Burawoy, 1998), this evaluation sought to uncover and extend theory that already existed. This was a reflexive and retroductive process that enabled me to foreground the knowledge



of co-evaluators in terms of their own personal micro-theories, as well as how these related to mid-range theories. The aim was therefore to contribute to the reconstructing of the “body of theory that is continually evolving” (Burawoy, 1998, 27).

I undertook a narrative synthesis of the transcripts in three stages (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006, 170). Initially, I separated the responses into logical categories (responses to the questions). Next, I developed the themes of values (personal micro-theories) and identified the mid-range theories regarding prior discipline. Finally, I synthesised the co-evaluators’ responses into two broad categories by considering their experiences as related across all of the questions asked.

The question of whether co-evaluators have personal or mid-range theories was therefore answered in two broad categories. These are firstly ‘stability generators’; the personal strengths and support relied on for “the creativity required to survive during these periods of chronic uncertainty” (Saunders et al., 2005, 41). The second, ‘instability generators’; the particular challenges faced in the role of middle-manager “when a new event radically changes or challenges traditional practices” (Saunders et al., 2005, 37). The stability generators and instability generators are addressed in turn in terms of how they relate to the situating literature, how they relate to the interview questions and the broader narrative of the co-evaluators. Within each category, several sub-themes are discussed.

## **Findings**

The ways co-evaluators develop stabilities can be conceptualised as provisional stability generators. I will address these before considering instability generators since appreciative inquiry aims to locate strengths from which practices can develop. Each stability generator is addressed in a sub-section below and enlivened with quotations from the co-evaluators.

### **Stability-generating micro-theories**

Co-evaluators’ personal values may be seen as their micro-level theories or underlying axiological perspective. Co-evaluator R stated “knowing that if you behave professionally you do things in the right way, and do things in the right way by other people”. This captures a micro-theory of professional management behaviour: as managing a balance between organisational requirements and the needs of people, which was common to all co-evaluators. This echoes the issue of hybridity

(Winter, 2017; Whitchurch and Gordon, 2010), as well as the importance of management itself as a professional identity.

House (2006, 121) argues that a particular concept of values has “misled us ... called the fact/value dichotomy”. He suggests that we “can deal with both fact and value claims rationally ... Indeed, values that are carefully considered are evaluations”.

The questions I asked co-evaluators were not so blunt as to ask them to state their values to me. Instead, I listened for these in the recollections of the reasons they had applied for a middle-management role. These ‘facts’ were likely to have been underpinned by values. I had begun the interviews looking for micro-theories about personal theories of change, which I imagined would have been learned through professional training. During the first interview, a moment of co-created clarity occurred to me regarding the deeper nature of values. The following interaction followed a period of reflecting on the motivations of self and others for their behaviours:

Me: It sounds like a really human thing to do [to try and see things from the perspectives of others], but it also sounds like it’s informed by a professional value process

Co-evaluator G: mmm

Me: I wondered if that is something you consciously reflect on, your professional body perhaps, or ethics or values or

Co-evaluator G: It’s always been my ethic really and I hope

Me: It’s always been

Co-evaluator G: I hope, yes

Me: That’s the ethic that you took into the profession

Co-evaluator G: Mmm, it’s probably why I was interested in [discipline] in the start, because I am interested in people.

Me: You’ve always been interested in people, and motivation

Co-evaluator G: Yes, so inter-disciplinary probably

In interviewing the other co-evaluators, I listened closely for values as demi-regularities. It led me to conclude that it was these values that would underpin the ‘type’ of manager they would be. Table 2 captures these demi-regularities.

The question “Why did you want to undertake the role?” elicited responses about the motivations co-evaluators ascribed to themselves. These were telling in that they did not seem to match attributes that would be expected of hard managerial practice, but also that they indicated that whilst collegial approaches were largely preferred, there were circumstances in which this was not deemed possible, or appropriate. All narratives indicated that they reflected on their decisions and the impact on individuals and teams, as well as the university. They did not suggest that managerialism as an ideology particularly influenced their practice either explicitly or implicitly.

Their practice instead appears to be underpinned by the personal values indicated earlier. Some were explicitly stated and some attributed by me through the nature of what was being said. For example, co-evaluators referred to the value of fairness. When they recounted aspects of the ways they tried to exercise this in practice, I was able to attribute values such as compassion:

Co-evaluator G states:

If someone you’re managing and the person is being difficult with you. They are still a person.

And empathy:

Co-evaluator U states:

It’s the why people do it. So people can do something but their intent isn’t to harm, you know they are emotional they’ve got other things on or have not even thought about the bigger picture because they’ve not got the information to make the decision.

Some of the comments about values by co-evaluators occurred in responding to the question of why they had decided to undertake the role. Others appeared as they reflected on their experiences in the role, giving examples of things that had challenged them, and some specifically when asked to recount their strengths.

## **Table 2 Values as demi-regularities**

Respect	Compassion	Loyalty	Trust
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Honesty	Humility	Care	Patience
Integrity	Resilience	Ethics	Courage
Empathy	Fairness	Self-reflection	Professionalism

Table 3 below uses a response from each evaluator that illustrates common themes of motivation for undertaking the role. Stability-generating mid-range theories (MRT) regarding change If change is understood as an instability generator, perhaps MRTs from prior disciplines could provide a source of stability in coping with change. Co-evaluator G summed up general attitudes towards change and the institutional imperative for it:

I know people generally don't like change and I get all that, and I got all that before I came into the role. I knew change needed to happen in our school and the university more widely.

In most cases, it was explicit that when considering change, co-evaluators drew on mid-range theories from prior professional practice. Evidence for this was gathered from answers to the question: What understanding of change did you come into the role with that you've drawn on to help you with difficulties?

Most named a theory that in some way related to their discipline. These included Prochaska and DiClemente's (1983) model on facilitating change in the cases of unwanted or undesirable behaviours particularly related to health, Milgram's (1963) work on how far participants would comply with an authority figure in acts that would normally seem to go against their personal conscience, Asch's (1951) work on conformity related to peer pressure, Kubler-Ross's change curve (1969) and Berne's (1964) transactional analysis about difficulties in communication between people. They relate to helping people to change. In some cases, change can happen through socialisation processes that are not always in awareness (and therefore choice), and in others through purposeful self-development in response to challenging life events. Implicit mid-range theories were also present, particularly

**Table 3 Motivations for undertaking the role**

Make a difference	(O) To improve its way of working with people and students, a lot of things about processes that could make a difference
Collegial	(R) I think it's because I'd had this idea of bringing everybody on board and doing things together
Use institutional knowledge of what has gone before to make things better/have a voice	(G) Because I could use my experience in a positive way and I can make a difference
Belief in future potential	(U) I could see the potential and the vision
Wanting to take action to change things for the better	(P) Sometimes you've got to step up to the mark, anyway, you can't kind of say you don't like the way others are doing it, sometimes it's kind of time to step up and say 'do you know what, I'll give it a go'

noted being reflective practice, professional practice and evidence-based practice.

They were broadly related to human individual behaviour change, rather than group or organisational change. Some co-evaluators alluded to theories of change management, for example, as suggested by Lewin (1958), unfreezing, change and freezing needing to occur for culture and practices to change. Kotter's (2014) network dual operating system approach to leadership and volunteer change agents was mentioned. No one disclosed any prior knowledge of change related to HE specifically. This accords with practices found in the literature.

### **Stability-generating personal resilience**

Resilience can be defined as the ability to bounce back in the face of difficulties encountered. It is therefore an important aspect of gaining provisional-stability in dealing with change. All co-evaluators mentioned their own personal resilience. Most felt that they had gained and grown from the experience of learning on the job but indicated that they would have valued some specific training, induction or preparation from the outset. This was especially with regard to management processes and procedures, such as HR, finances and in general the parameters of their decision-making empowerment.

### **Stability-generating learning experience**

Co-evaluators related their experiences of 'learning on the job'. Co-evaluator U summed up the experience:

I think that when I look back to the last 18 months it's been really difficult and really challenging, but I'm really grateful for all the really difficult people I've encountered because they've taught me a lot. Not just about policies and HR and legal stuff but they've taught me a lot about myself. So I think if I look back and think would I change it for me? I probably would say no, because I'm grateful for all that learning I've done. But my concern is that there have been times when the issues have been so severe, and there hasn't been the support that if I hadn't been really resilient. That's why if it was somebody else I wouldn't want them to go through what I've gone through.

### **Stability-generating internal and external support**

Some co-evaluators indicated that they had received good support from other teams such as HR and their line manager. Others had a more ambivalent view of this, which may be influenced by the particular challenges they had faced as well as personal preference or expectations of support.

Floyd (2016, 17) relates that participants of his research (regarding the need to support middle-managers in academia) experienced that "one of the ways that they had learned to cope with the demands of the job was through informal peer consultation" and that "it appears that this process allowed for reflection".

Informal peer support and sharing experiences were mentioned as valuable by all five co-evaluators. Three also specifically mentioned external arrangements such as mentoring as something they particularly benefitted from and would recommend for those undertaking the role in future. One was very clear that she did not wish to discuss particular challenges with peers, feeling that this was not fair to them. She did value sharing experiences and humour more generally.

Co-evaluator P specifically reflected that it was probably beneficial that all started together and that it may have been more difficult starting alone. All indicated that they thought it would have been beneficial to receive some preparation before undertaking the role and that they would certainly recommend this for others coming into the role. Most explicitly stated that this was probably not available at the time they had started due to ongoing state of flux 'higher-up' in the organisation, but imagined that this would now be forthcoming, citing recent training that had been valuable, but that would have been even more useful at the outset.

The value of support from more senior management was highlighted by co-evaluator R:

Certainly our Head of School (HoS) has been totally supportive. It's people who value what you have to say. The DVC has said to me on a couple of occasions 'are you OK'? I've said 'yes I am, thank-you'. We've not really had any more of a conversation than that, but it's almost like someone putting their hand on your shoulder and going 'just keep going, it's OK'.

All referred to the importance of support offered by family and friends in maintaining their resilience. Comments were made on the impact their role had on their families and that families and friends were a source of resilience in anchoring themselves to the reality that there were other things in life that mattered that were separate from work:

Co-evaluator P: In fact (family member) pointed out to me that I'm working at least an additional 2 hours a day. It has been pointed out to me that 'this job is really impacting on you, you are working a lot longer, and you seem more stressed'. I sometimes have not done things with family and friends because of the job. There is a personal cost. This reflects the findings of Floyd and Dimmick (2011), who comment on the negative impact on personal lives of department heads of their management role.

### **Stability-generating reflection**

Birds (2014, 90) states "when we reflect, we give the learning a space to be processed, and more likely integrated into future thoughts and actions". Co-evaluators referred to utilising informal peer support (as identified by Floyd, 2016), families and friends and in some cases formal external consultation such as mentors.

Co-evaluator R clearly demonstrated the benefit of reflection:

I think it's like professional growth isn't it? Where you learn about who you are in this context, because that can change and that's the secret isn't it. So what works now, may not work in a different context, but it's finding myself in this context and how I can manoeuvre around.

Reflection contributed to the theme about the value of learning. Co-evaluator O mentioned 'liking having a concept to hang things on' and undertaking further study to develop more competence in role.

Co-evaluator G highlighted the benefit of purposeful self-reflection: So I challenge myself, if this is a decision that I know from the outside might look 'why's she doing this, this is so unfair because this

person who is affected is actually really great' then I do have to check back in. Reflection concludes the stability generator section. It was a theme that threaded throughout all of the others. Below the instability-generating challenges that the co-evaluators experienced in their roles are discussed.

### **Instability Generators**

If we consider that change creates instabilities as proposed by Saunders et al. (2005) and that people generally do not like change as co-evaluator G states, perhaps the challenges faced by middle managers can be conceptualised as instability generators. Co-evaluators' responses to the question: "What has been the most surprising to you about people's reactions to change that the role has brought?" elicited responses about the challenges faced in their roles. Instability generators that emerged from the interviews are presented in turn:

#### **Instability-generating perceptions of managed academics attitudes towards management**

In academia, the term management is viewed quite pejoratively (Briggs, 2007). Perhaps this is due to a perception that management is opposed to autonomy and collegialism. The perceptions of management attributed to managed colleagues by co-evaluators indicated that the managed academics (Winter, 2009) viewed them as different, despite their best efforts to display their continuing values and desire to work collegially.

Co-evaluators' perceptions of themselves and their management practices did not seem to warrant the ways in which they reported some colleagues reacted to them in their role. Possibly colleagues' behaviours towards those holding management roles are informed by assumptions of managers' motivations that differ from the managers' aims in practice.

Co-evaluator R put it succinctly:

It's this whole 'How dare you ask me to do anything else' that I struggle with, when staff are using the notion of academic freedom and their expertise and right to define their own role to avoid doing something to help.

Co-evaluator U went a little further:

I guess there were two shocks for me, the first shock was that the people were like that [actively engaged in malicious behaviour], I'd never encountered that before with individuals. Then the lack of professional mechanisms to control that.

Co-evaluator O:

There seems to be a way that 'management' in inverted commas is targeted as being 'bad'



And most clearly co-evaluator P:

What's been most surprising is people who are very reasonable, when you know somebody on the same level um, how some people, I think, seem to struggle with the whole concept of a manager. Some people just do really struggle with that role. This accords with Preston and Price (2012) who highlight the challenges of moving between peer and management roles.

### **Perceptions of some colleagues' views of women in management roles**

On three occasions, a follow-up question was asked as to whether the co-evaluator considered that reactions were different because they were a woman. I have noted that I did this when the co-evaluator had mentioned the word 'he' or 'him' when discussing some aspect of their experience. This highlighted some subtle, but clear, experiences of sexism.

Co-evaluator G:

Sometimes you can't actually put your finger on it, but sometimes people will say something and you'll think 'if I was male would you say that to me'? Later, she recounted a clearer example:

He thought I was putting the tea and coffee out, I don't really like using titles but I did use it then.

Co-evaluator R explained: It has been males that have been more difficult, with a female, who that person had worked alongside, being their line manager. I've been to other meetings where I've been with another male member of staff and he's taller and he's got a bit of gravitas and I've been ignored in conversations, not deliberately but definitely. These statements appear to suggest that in some circumstances the romantic notion of collegiality is not extended to women managers by some managed academics. This subtle sexism may play a part as an instability generator.

### **Instability-generating lack of role clarity**

A lack of clarity in the role in how it was presented to the academics who would be managed was highlighted by all. This was cited as a reason contributing to some of the initial challenges faced in taking on the role and was experienced by co-evaluators as a lack of empowerment, which they also attributed to a lack of control over financial decisions. Co-evaluator R mentioned the challenges of 'pressures from both sides' and 'having a foot in each camp', whilst co-evaluators G and P both enjoyed the fact that the role division enabled them to retain aspects of the academic role they especially enjoyed. These included teaching and research.

Co-evaluator P pointed out: In many ways I think we've had to kind of make it up ourselves.

Co-evaluator U suggested: One of the biggest things that would've made a huge difference in the beginning would have been a meeting with HoS with each of the areas to define to each of the areas

what our roles and responsibilities were. Because we had to do that and we had to do it with peers. I think that a lot of the conflict that we have now is because they don't get the bigger picture. We're now still having to struggle with persuading people that this is what we are supposed to be doing.

Other comments seem to relate to not being secure in the 'right to manage'. Lack of role clarity may also relate to lack of preparation for the role which is discussed further below.

### **Instability-generating lack of preparation for managing in an academic setting**

As previously stated, none of the co-evaluators had prior training or induction into their middle-management roles in H.E It seems that the values and transferrable skills possessed by the co-evaluators were deemed sufficient to enable them to be successful in their roles.

Co-evaluator O said:

That's something I think about the organisation too, why would we expect academics to understand business, we need to explain. We need to help people, because I think people do feel passionately about the university and developing.

Co-evaluator G commented:

How do you move that willingness to understand to an understanding?

Co-evaluator G said:

So I knew where I wanted to get, and why I wanted to get there but I didn't know about the processes and it's been a steep learning curve on how to make that happen.

### **Instability-generating experiences of dealing with malicious intent**

Hellawell and Hancock (2001) propose that middle-management is "between hierarchical control and collegiality". They state that more directive management may be required in circumstances where colleagues refuse to act according to professional responsibilities that are afforded through autonomous working. Co-evaluators had commented on issues relating to lack of role clarity and empowerment, and in the case of U, had gone as far as to say that processes were not in place to deal with issues effectively in the case of actively malicious intent.

Co-evaluator U also commented:

It's really difficult to be accountable for something that you can't control.

Co-evaluator R when discussing a situation in which a malicious grievance had been made (and not upheld) when she was managing some inappropriate behaviour by a team member: The process has been pretty harrowing. She went on to describe how she had needed support from peers and family at that time and that it was a time when she had considered whether the role was worth it.

Co-evaluator O:

There's that intelligence that is enough to just hurt, to cause just enough doubt that you can't quite just shake it... it felt much more calculating. Surely, as a teacher, and as part of our contract, don't we subscribe to the values of the university?

In such eventualities, the tendency is for the managed academic staff member to be perceived as the more vulnerable, because they are subject to being managed. Where unprofessional, unethical and immoral activities are observed, but are subtle and hard to prove, the middle-managers position is particularly difficult since the colleague is using the "cloak of legitimacy" Brundrett (1998, 311) refers to in order to avoid doing what is needed. Having considered both stability generators and instability generators, reflections for the future are offered below.

### **Reflections for the Future**

The co-evaluators were asked to consider what they would want to have in place if they were preparing people to take on the role in future. This demonstrated a desire to mitigate against instability generators they had experienced for people coming into the role in future. All indicated that training would be valuable. They highlighted several key areas. These were access to information, clear definition of the empowerment and limitations of their role (role clarity), clear explanation to managed academics from senior leadership of the role they now held, decision making empowerment including financial/budgetary responsibility, training on relevant processes and procedures relating to management processes such as HR from the outset and dealing with challenging conversations.

Since none of the co-evaluators had indicated prior awareness of concepts related to management of people and change in HE, a follow-up prompt was used to gain some understanding of whether this would be useful: Do you think it would be helpful to learn about theories of change that apply to HE organisations?

Co-evaluators alluded to the fact that recent training they had received was very useful, but would have been even more so had it been received prior to or early into the role.

Co-evaluator G said:

You'd only need a couple of days. You know, something from HR, something from Finance. I would advise somebody to have a mentor.

Co-evaluator U suggests:

Clarity right from the start. This person is doing this role and they are acting on my behalf.

Co-evaluator P thought:

It would have been beneficial to have had some kind of induction and then, you kind of review then and look at what else you need... I think it's probably reflection of the resilience of the people that have had the roles that they are still here really.

Lack of development prior to starting middle-management roles is reflected in the literature. Having reflected on it and offering recommendations for the future, co-evaluators may be in a position to implement this in their own future management practice and contribute to the development of a reflective learning organisation.

## **Conclusions**

Arriving at the conclusions of this evaluation has been an iterative and creative process. It has involved retroduction (Olsen, 2010), utilising my experience and reflecting on it in the light of additional evidence in keeping with realist evaluative practice. My experience as a trained listener was commented on anecdotally by two of the co-evaluators. This was utilised during the interviews and in listening back to them and transcribing them. This professional experience has, I hope, enabled me to listen to the values, feelings and meanings behind the words and then select examples of co-evaluators' responses to represent the broader picture of their experiences and practices, whilst respecting their individual nature.

The practice of this group seems to be underpinned by strong values that do not align well to new-managerialism. The aims, attitudes and reported activities of co-evaluators suggest that they cannot be described as belonging to a new-managerialist community of practice. The alternate concepts of hybridity (Winter, 2017), professionalism (Kolsaker, 2008; Winter, 2017) and humanistic management practices (Pirson, 2017) may be a better fit in accounting for their practices.

Of course, one can always argue that individuals are not necessarily the most reliable reporters of their own beliefs and actions. An aim of this appreciative inquiry was to collaboratively reflect on

practice and identify potential areas for improvement. Reflection on practice and values was a feature of the self-evaluation. Values, as House (2006) points out, are facts at a certain level of reality.

This self-evaluation suggests that management concepts and practices in higher education are not completely understood, despite the somewhat axiomatic usage of the term new-managerialism.

The complexity, negotiation and multiple sources of information and reflection utilised in decision making highlight the importance relational aspects such as perspective-taking (Winter, 2017). This allows for both hard and soft managerial practices, depending on fluid, relational, nonlinear decision-making processes in complex situations. This highlights the importance of psychological flexibility and preparedness for middle-management roles in HE, which should be considered in the selection and training of role holders.

Future research may aid in developing knowledge regarding how training and preparation for management roles develop awareness of values-based practices. This may aid in developing provisional-stabilities. Reflections for the future indicated that preparation, including training, for middle-management was seen as desirable. It may offer the potential to support managers in creating provisional-stabilities in dealing with the continually changing situations they find themselves in. This may be enhanced through education on theories of change in higher education, role clarity and understanding the right to manage. Additionally, processes should be in place to support managers in the cases where colleagues' behaviour lacks the professionalism afforded through autonomy.

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