Drawing critically on established theories of educational leadership, analyse and evaluate a significant aspect of educational leadership practice.

A Systemic Approach to Leading and Managing a University

Introduction

Rost (1991) identifies that the words leading and managing have for a long time been treated synonymously and he tries to make the distinction between the two. It can however be seen from the paper that in reality good leadership and management practices are indeed intertwined. On this basis it is deemed justifiable in this paper not to contribute to the semantic discussion on definitions of Leadership and Management but rather to concentrate on the identification of good leadership and management practices and how these enable a university to continuously improve so that it is able to provide a distinctive quality offering in a crowded market place.

The paper endorses Bush and Glovers (2003) remarks when they conduct a literature review of common themes of leadership and conclude that leaders adopt different approaches according to the context within which they work. In order to capture the varying leadership/management approaches to differing contexts, the paper tentatively proposes and tests a methodology of identifying good leadership and management practice within education. The proposed methodology is to use educational practitioners experiences within education and to analyse them using current managerial theory. For the purposes of this paper the author shall use her own experiences of working in a Higher Education environment. It is intended that this paper will draw directly from the author's own practice and experiences in order that correlations or differences can be identified between the established theoretical knowledge of educational leadership. It should be noted however, that in order to gain validity this methodology would need to be further tested.

Finally, it is argued that the development of a systemic approach enables a clear link between aims, strategy and operational management and therefore ensures a strong internal accountability. On this basis (contrary to the established organizational theorists) a case is made that education/universities should establish a closed system in order to ensure that the fundamental values of education are achieved.

Key Theoretical Ideas that are central to this paper

Capturing Leadership Practice

Bush and Glover (2003) undertake a literature review and identify common themes linking the numerous definitions of leadership; Leadership as influence, Leadership and values, Leadership and vision, Leadership and management. Whilst it is useful to identify these common themes within literature, as the paper identifies in its conclusion 'they are artificial distinctions in that most successful leaders are likely to embody most or all of these approaches in their work.' (pg 12) This then leads to the question; which elements do leaders use, in which context and in what proportions? Obtaining an answer to this question is not simplistic and would rely on gathering

examples of professional practice and comparing it to empirical study so that empirical study can either be updated or ratified.

Stake (1984) presents an argument for the naturalistic enquiry approach and identifies that it has been a neglected element in facilitating change and improvement in educational practice. Stake elaborates and highlights that whilst external forces, such as the government (as the result of the latest research or due to societal pressure) may instigate planned changes in the form of new curriculum ultimately it is the teacher who delivers the change and ensures that, that change becomes daily practice, or not. It is the teacher who is having to respond to the pupil and changing their methods of teaching delivery to facilitate the learning requirements of that pupil in order to get the best out of them. Ultimately, whilst external researchers and stakeholders can make proposals of best practice it is the teacher who is actually carrying out the research. It can be seen from this how important it is that the learning and teaching strategy features at the very heart of a school/university. In addition it can also be seen how important it is for teachers to capture their best practice in order that it may be disseminated back to researchers or government.

Snow (2001 pg 3) best encapsulates this theory when she recognizes that; "The capacity to reflect on and analyze one's knowledge emerges only after considerable knowledge has been accumulated and embedded into practice. The reflections of skilled practitioners in any field deserve to be systemized so that personal knowledge can become publicly accessible and subject to analysis". It is therefore my intention to make my own knowledge and experience explicit in this paper in order that it may be analyzed.

Why a Systemic Approach to Leading and Managing a University?

Childress et al (2007) recognize the role of developing (what they call a) framework (as represented below) in order that organizational elements are aligned to ensure that students are able to achieve the performance goals that have been set. In fact Childress is advocating the development of a systemic approach to managing in public education.
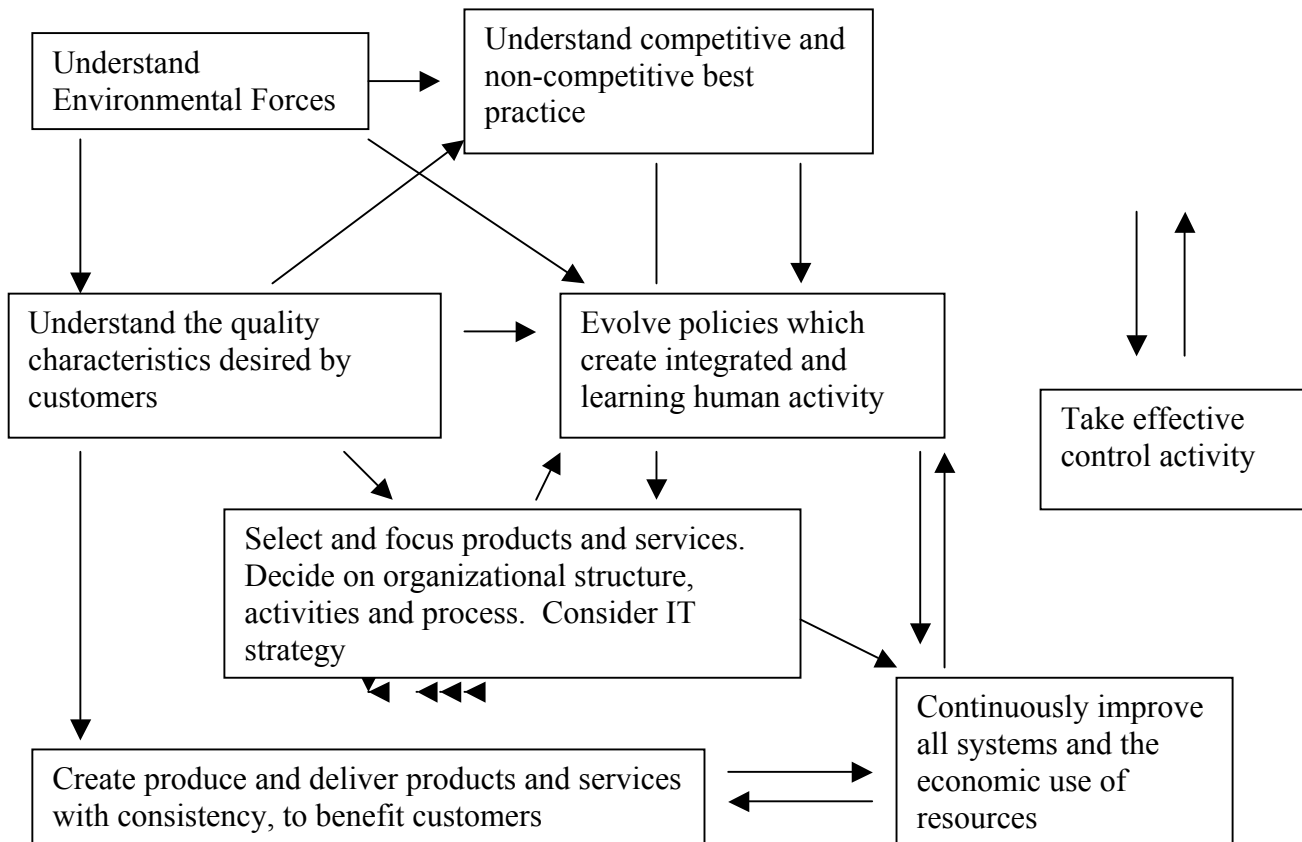
Diagram One

PELP Coherence Framework
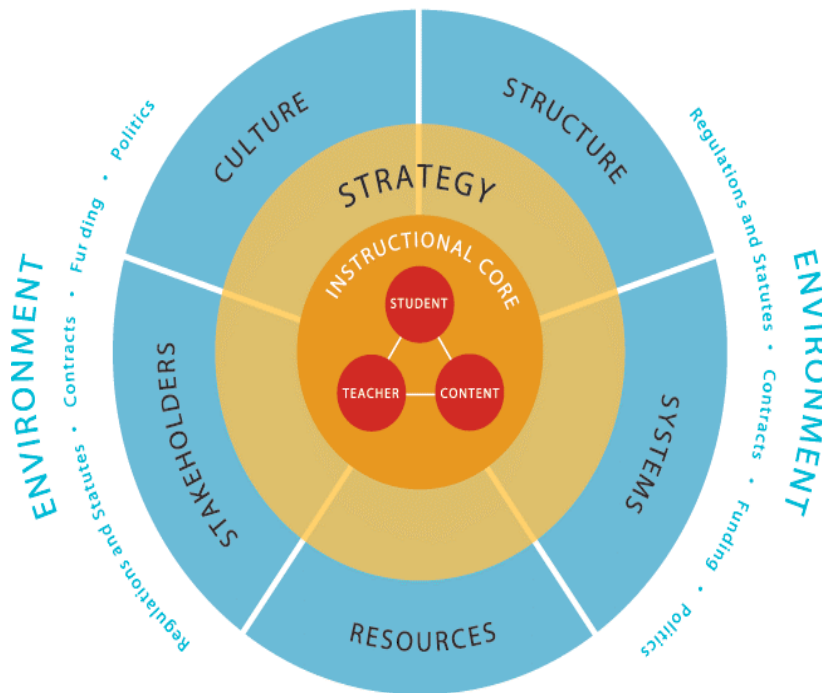
The ensuing model that is developed whilst it recognizes the inter-dependence of various organizational elements, the way it is structured does not have congruence with reality. For example, culture (on the external edge of the circle) seems to influence the strategy, realistically; culture is not dictated by external stakeholders but surely sits at the very heart of a school or organization as culture is the very essence of the people who are within it. The understanding of culture – how it is influenced and embraced to ensure that it works as a positive influence in achieving educational goals is crucial in determining a system design.

In contrast to Childress et al's approach Castle (1996 pgs 7 - 13) puts value systems at the heart of his systemic model, (seen in diagram Two)

The Integrated Quality System (Castle 1996)

Understand Environmental Forces	Understand competitive and non-competitive best practice

Understand the quality characteristics desired by customers

Evolve policies which create integrated and learning human activity

Take effective control activity

Select and focus products and services. Decide on organizational structure, activities and process. Consider IT strategy

Create produce and deliver products and services with consistency, to benefit customers

Continuously improve all systems and the economic use of resources

where there is an activity called "Evolve policies which create motivated, integrated and learning human activity." It is deemed necessary that for continuous learning to occur where managers and employees think constantly and creatively about the needs of the organization it is necessary for value systems to be developed. Castle calls upon both Vickers (1986) in Checkland, P.B. and Casar, A., and Bates (1994) perspectives and concludes that in order to develop a value system in organizations where there are many cultural pools it is essential that organizational members are able to live an experience over a period of time so that espoused theories come to fruition and that viewpoints and activities are linked. This statement when applied to the education sector implies that universities should not constantly react to external stakeholders constantly changing incentives, policy directives and reforms and raises the question as to weather a closed system approach should be adopted.

In order to develop his system, Castle(1996) reviews the work of 50 years of organizational study and during the process identifies that for an organization to thrive there is a necessity for it to continuously improve by using quality as a strategy for distinction in the marketplace. Castle is inspired by Feigenbaum (1983) who advocates the need for integrated activity of all those in the organization and as a result Castle devises a holistic systemic approach that pulls together established theoretical knowledge of business management. Indeed with the diverse cultural nature of a university it can be seen within this paper how important it is that a holistic approach is taken. Whilst the section below identifies the 'Pile of Purposes'

Handy and Aitkins (1996) that exists within the education sector, creating a systemic approach aligned to organizational values (strengthening its internal accountability, see page 10)   allows the university to focus on the core business thereby decreasing the 'Pile of Purposes'. As a result, the university and its underlying processes are more focussed and able to pursue competitive advantage.

Using 60 years of Organizational Study to benefit the advancement of University Leadership

Handy and Aitkins (1986) recognize that schools are just like any other organization with the exception of four principal differences. On this basis they recommend that it would be appropriate to learn and apply 60 years of organizational study to the education sector. Handy and Aitkin do however go on to identify four principal differences which they call, 'No time for management, The pile of purposes, Role switching, and The Children'.   It should be recognized that this work was comparing organizations to schools rather than universities. In order to better understand the differences between universities and organizations it would therefore be useful to draw further distinctions between schools and universities.

Comparison of four principal differences between organizations/schools and a university

Principal Differences	The School	The University
No Time for Management	No office space allocated for meetings. Time spent on meetings is left to professional conscience as teaching is considered to be what teachers are supposed to do.	Has a much larger structure than schools and as a result has a wide range of support services. In addition to teaching, academic staff are expected to conduct research. A meeting calendar is published where delegated staff are expected to attend during business hours. Time for middle management is divided between Managing/teaching/research
The Pile of purposes	It is deemed in the literature that schools like business have conflicting functions and no simple way of measuring success.	In this scenario universities are similar to schools and have many conflicting functions with no simple way of measuring success. One of the fundamental differences is that in addition to the educational advancement of students academic staff within a university are also expected to advance the knowledge pool through research. It is this knowledge pool that is used to educate university

		students and creates a distinction within the university market place between universities.
Role Switching	Teachers are promoted to managerial success purely on the basis that they are good teachers with little or no managerial training.	In this scenario universities are similar to schools and academics are often promoted to managerial positions purely on their teaching/research capabilities.
The Children	Children are not intuitively seen as parts of the organization by staff yet are viewed as the whole point of the school.	Students very much take on the same role as children in a school, however, the main difference is that students within a university pay for their education.

A critique of the above analysis

Firstly, Handy and Aitkin make the seemingly logical progression in their writings that by identifying similarities and differentials between organizations and schools that organizational theory/knowledge can be applied to the education sector where there are the similarities whilst the differentials need to be scrutinized and analyzed. Can it be said that by adding more variables into the equation of a qualitative study the solution is as simplistic as analysing the differences only rather than how the differences interact with accepted knowledge?   To exemplify:- What knock on impact do 'The Children' differential have on accepted managerial practice? Can the education sector be labelled as a service, in which case it could be argued that organizational service theory should be applied to schools and universities. Central to the writings of people such as Gordon (1989) is the fact that in order to understand who your competitors are you need to understand them from the minds of your customers. Which then leads to the question; who are the customers of a university? Is it the students, the government etc. If it is the students then consideration needs to be made to the debate that Hoffman and Kretovics (2004) have when they propose a definition of students as partial employees as compared to the existing metaphors of students as customer, product and employee. It is surely this metaphor that best encapsulates the relationship between the educator and the learner. It can therefore be seen that the addition of further differentials has knock on consequences to established organizational theory.

Secondly, when Handy and Aitken talk about The Pile of Purposes they imply that the education sector places a large emphasis on meeting all the needs of its stakeholders. Surely by identifying key stakeholders such as educational practitioners and their key values of educational practitioners the pile of purposes diminishes significantly? Interestingly, Elmore in Gunzenhauser and Hyde (2007) enforces this point when they look at accountability systems. They identify that internal accountability systems exist in relation to external accountability systems and that if schools are to be successful in responding to the pressures of external accountability systems it is necessary for them to have strong internal accountability systems. In this particular scenario it could be said that there is a necessity that in order to be successful

universities also need strong internal accountability systems. Elmore et al define internal accountability as "the shared norms, values, expectations, structures and processes that determine the relationship between individual actions and collective results in schools." They are implicitly endorsing that by identifying the educational practitioner key values and using them as an internal accountability system it is ensuring that it is easier for a school to be able to respond more easily and more effectively to external accountability systems. Clearly norms and values are an integral element in the identification of school purposes.

Using an Educational Practitioners' Experience to understand correlations or differences between the established theoretical Knowledge of Educational Leadership or Management.

Reflection One

A Pile of Purposes

My first true role within the education sector was working as a personal assistant to a Director of Resources within a pre 1992 university.

I first became aware of the tensions between the academic and administrative divisions of the university over a small incident. I was asked to ensure that the Director (who would be out and about could keep his finger on the pulse by having an electronic calendar on the road). I thought this a very simple and ordinary requirement as in the few roles that I had had previously this was considered to be the norm. I set about understanding which models of mobile phone would be compatible with the university's email and calendar system. The answer to the question was that nothing on the market proved to be compatible. It eventually emerged that the reason for this was that the IT department (which had a large majority of academically minded people) took a stance that Microsoft products were prone to virus's and contamination, as a result the university email and calendar system were considered to be technically superior to Microsoft products however the functionality of them was very restrictive. When the restrictions relating to functionality were pointed out to the IT department and the fact that 90% of the business community use Microsoft products it took the best part of a year to convince them that indeed in some instances it would be useful to be able to use Microsoft software.

When reviewing the theories of educational management House (1981) identifies that it is often necessary within the field of social sciences to analyse situations through various perspectives. Morgan (1997) takes a similar stance to House and uses metaphors to explain the complex character of organizations. Analysis of the above scenario perhaps draws parallels both with the political and cultural perspectives.

Political Perspective

Bush (2003 pg 90) recognizes that; "Political models assume that in organizations policy and decisions emerge through a process of negotiation and bargaining. Interest groups develop and form alliances in pursuit of particular policy objectives. Conflict is viewed as a natural phenomenon and power accrues to dominant coalitions rather than being the preserve of formal leaders." In this instance it can be seen how the two sections within the university have differing values and differing accountabilities. It was indeed very necessary for a good amount of bargaining and negotiation to
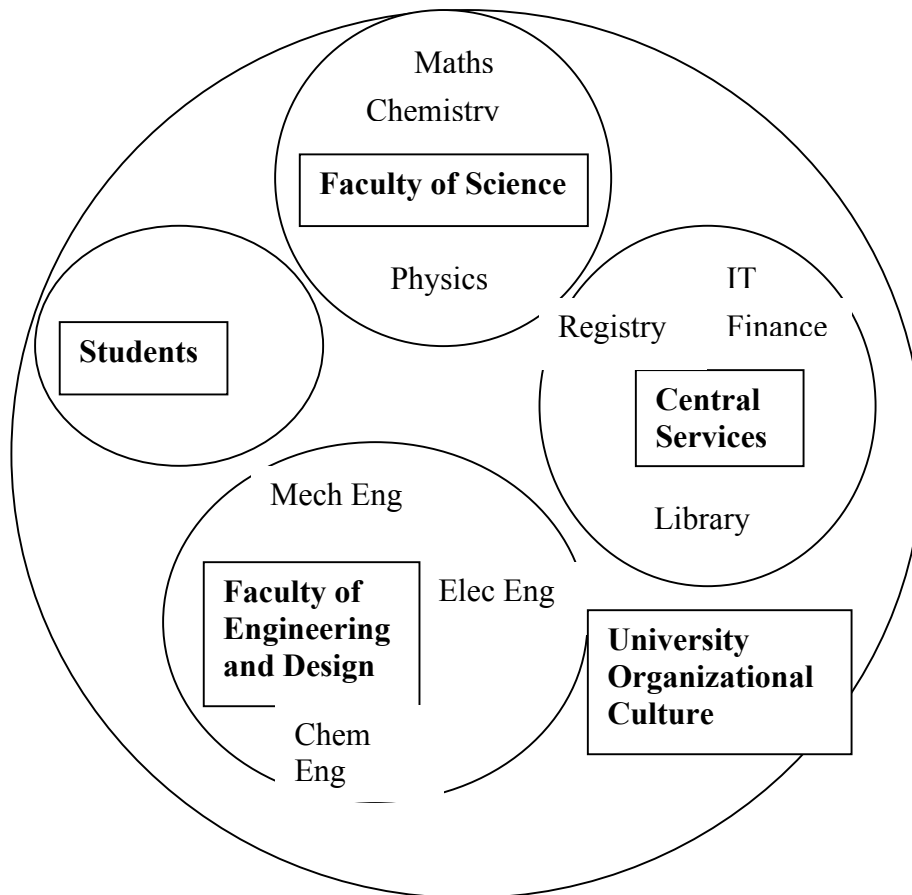
occur which was why it took a full year to achieve what at the outset looked to be a very simplistic objective. It can also be seen how the Director's formal power had a small amount of weighting but overall the power rested with the IT department who had established policy and objectives that were being threatened.

<u>Cultural Perspective</u>
Morgan (1997 pg 132) states "In any organization there may be different competing value systems that are a mosaic of organizational realities rather than a uniform corporate culture. Besides gender, race, language and ethnicity, religious socioeconomic, friendship and professional groups can have a decisive impact on culture". Diagram One illustrates the complex mosaic of cultures that exist in a university. Please note that this diagram is an extremely simplistic version of the reality. The diagram only categorizes cultures via professional interests it is likely as Morgan identifies that cultures will also exist eg between students who are from the same country or via UG students and PG students.

Maths

Chemistry

Faculty of Science

Physics

Students

IT

Registry   Finance

Central Services

Library

Mech Eng

Faculty of Engineering and Design

Elec Eng

University Organizational Culture

Chem Eng

Morgan (1992 pg 135) reviews the work of sociologist Harold Garfinkel who looks in depth at the social norms and identifies that life within a given culture flows smoothly only insofar as ones behaviour conforms with unwritten codes. Disrupt these norms and the ordered reality of life inevitably breaks down. Morgan then elaborates and identifies that we sub consciously make decisions about every day life before it is necessary to enact a norm or a code but that sense-making process or justification for action will only occur if behaviour is challenged. It can be seen how in the above example the IT in the initial stance took there standardized response it was not until their behaviour was challenged that they referred back to their norms and in their eyes their action was justified. The reason why the whole process took a year to rectify was because essentially it was deemed necessary to change the IT departments' norms. Owing to the complex cultural nature of a university this example has highlighted the importance of ensuring that there are strong cultural synergies at organizational (university) level.

By reviewing the same reflection through two different perspectives it can be seen how different conclusions can be arrived at. However what is highlighted by both perspectives is that if both parties had the value for example of; "We are trying to do what is best to benefit the students" this could have been used as an underlying principle to resolve the debate and insure that both parties are working towards a common goal.

Reflection Two

No Time for Management
My second role was as a junior manager in a post 1992 university. My first experience of management. I was in charge of an office of administrative assistants and also Executive Assistant to a Vice Chancellor.

Once in post and after my first meeting with the VC (my line manager) I quickly concluded how busy he always was, my natural propensity to pass the niceties of day were quickly squashed. This resulted in me feeling that all conversations were timed and therefore need to be kept as brief and concise and work focussed as possible. I would build up lists of points for my weekly meetings that needed to be resolved. These lists eventually were transcribed into an email and weekly meetings no longer happened. Eventually, I was going for periods of months communicating with the VC either by telephone or email. The VC consequently was managing both me and indirectly my team without being able to relate to my personality and the various personalities within the team. I was being told how to do my work by someone who was disconnected with the everyday realities that I was facing. Four years later when I left the position I realised how much I resented the VC because I felt that I had been treated like a machine, masked under the guise of what I thought at the time, as professionalism.

Retrospectively, I can see how the Vice Chancellor's personality, way of working and expectations, heavily influenced my own way of working, how I related to my team and eventually I lost connection with my 'real self'. I also began to detach myself from the various personalities within the team and set perhaps on occasions set too high standards that failed to relent to account for human weakness/personality/emotion. My own personality had become overshadowed by constantly thinking that I could not portray the real me. The sense of fun and humour that had somehow managed to be integrated into past jobs had been trampled upon. Yet it was the 'real me' in past roles that had made them so successful. It can be said that Hochschild's (1983) work has helped to me to conclude the above. Hochschild looks at how the sophisticated modern working environment profits from controlling the emotions that employees display to customers. The work focuses on the aerospace industry and in particular on flight attendants who are trained that no matter what the situation that they should smile. Hoschild takes an in-depth look at the effects that this has on workers. Ultimately it is deemed that the worker feels devalued. Whilst it can be said that I was not told to behave in a certain manner by the VC, his influence over me implicitly defined certain behavioural rules and expectations that ensured that my emotions were controlled in a certain way to benefit the university. The effects of the VC having very little time for managing his direct reportees is apparent in the above scenario. Whilst the VC was good at identifying a vision and determining strategic direction linking the strategic direction to operational management did not always happen. Of course in order to strengthen validity on the above account a second practitioner reflection should be sought.

Reflection Three

The Children
The following scenario occurred whilst I was in the job described in reflection Two.

The VC had been warned by HEFCE that he needed to reduce the numbers of students in his university who were failing to complete their courses. After conducting an initial analysis the VC determined that the students who were coming to the university were from a low socio-economic background and were failing to complete courses due to the enormous cultural differences between their school environment and the university environment. As a result, the VC decided to take his senior management members to a secondary school which like the university also had an intake of pupils from a low socio-economic background but despite this ensured that their students left the school with above average qualifications. Whilst touring the school the following observations were made:

- There were large notices informing students what they needed to do to get from one grade to another and from one level of qualification to another.
- The smallest detail was adhered to from ensuring that water was present in every classroom, (as research had identified that if the brain is short of water it will not perform to its maximum potential), to telling the children that they needed to revise on landscape orientated paper.
- The headteacher used statistics in order to ascertain the performance of her teachers. Children were assessed on entering the school and at certain stages of their progress. Each teacher was expected to progress a child a certain distance. If they performed satisfactorily they were given performance related pay if they did not perform then they were questioned.

In this instance it can be seen how the headteacher rather than placing emphases upon her leadership qualities puts in place processes and policies and she pays attention to management detail. "Successful management requires a clear link between aims, strategy and operational management", (Bush 2003 pg 3). After the development of aims and strategy the headteacher then ensured that all operational management was aligned. She did this by testing the children upon entry to the school and monitoring their marks in order to ensure that the teacher is adding value to their education. What is important to note is how initially the headteacher had to have the capacity for leadership in order to have the initial vision and to attune that vision (by creating a value system amongst her staff). The job of the headteacher and as leader was made easier owing to the fact that the fundamental change the headteacher was trying to bring about was the educational advancement of her pupils – a key value that would appeal to all her staff (as educational practitioners) and would require a minimal amount of the headteacher's influencing skills in order that she could then influence the staff to implement it. Clearly it can be seen how managerial processes have made the leadership role easier.

What is clear from the above is that not only did the school have a very clear purpose, but that it was clearly communicated to all staff and students so that they were able to make the espoused theory of the headteacher come alive and live it.

It is interesting to note that the visiting staff from the university went back to implement some of the ideas that came forward from the school such as posters around the university telling students what they needed to do to get from one level of study to another, however rewarding staff according to their performance did not occur. Student drop out rates were not heavily influenced by this initiative which perhaps leads to the question; Did the VC fail to influence the university staff value systems and the changes that were made were only superficial ones? Were too many

other initiatives occurring at the same time in order to please a variety of stakeholders and therefore the university had a weakened internal accountability system?

The link between open or closed systems and strong internal accountability systems
Comparing the way in which both the school and the university relate to their external environment highlights other crucial points. It could be said that the school operated a closed system approach. The development of a very strong value system amongst the school staff meant that the school was in fact developing a very strong internal accountability system. (Please see pg 3 and Elmore et al's definition of internal accountability). The vision was communicated to both the internal and external community; by doing this it could be said that the headteacher was influencing the external environment and not responding to external demands. What is rather a strange phenomenon is that the headteacher was setting her own very clear concise measurable standards against which she as a leader would be judged. The external environment seemed not only to accept these objectives but in effect it distracted them from dictating their own objectives to the school! Application of the above scenario to systems theory strengthens the case for the education sector to structure their systems as closed systems thereby strengthening internal accountability.   This approach is a complete contrast to work done by organizational theorists such as Porter (1980) who advocates the need to constantly scan the environment in order to gain competitive advantage.

In contrast, the university was reacting to a dictate by HEFCE and the initiative was explained as such to university staff. Straight away this would mean that the initiative sold to staff in this way would have not gained their complete support. Fundamentally, key educational practitioners values are to advance educational knowledge to their students rather than ensure the well being of the funding body. In addition whilst the headteacher created a systemic approach to ensuring that her vision was espoused at operational level this did not happen at the university. By being reactive, the university was being influenced by its environment; as a result its internal systems would not necessarily have been empathetic to the initiative.

Suggested System for Managing and Leading a University
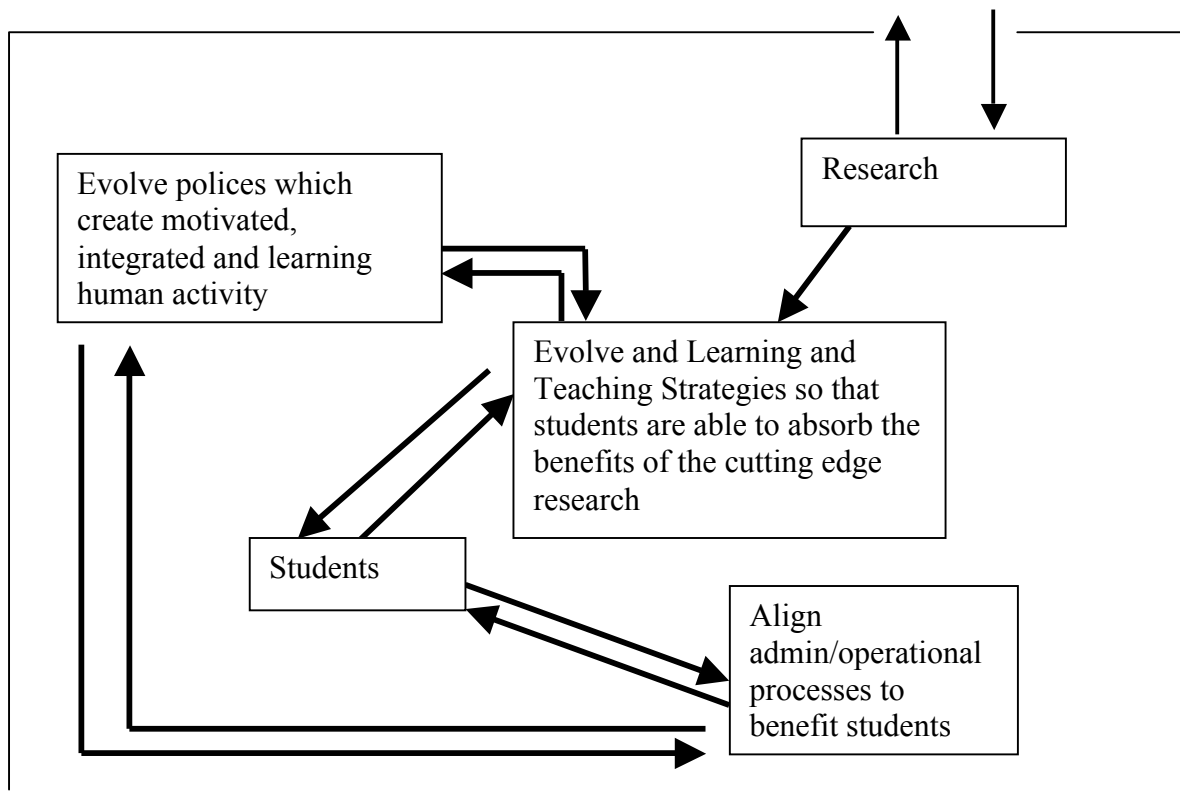
Whilst this system appears to be a closed system it should be noted that as both the Students and the Learning and Teaching Strategies (L&T) are at the heart it is inevitable that the students will bring with them external influences and therefore the system is not completely closed. In addition, it is vital that the research element of the university is influenced by the external environment in order that both the Learning and Teaching strategies are innovative, thereby ensuring the university has a distinctive quality offering in a crowded market place. A fundamental element to this system is an integrated process to capture professional knowledge of the practitioners from the learning and teaching strategies and then for it to be fed back both to the L&T strategies and to the operational/admin process, thereby ensuring that the university is constantly evolving and learning.

Conclusion
The methodology of capturing lived experiences and making them explicit has highlighted some interesting points. A theme that seems to run consistently throughout the paper is that of culture. It is apparent that a vital quality for a leader and manager to have is a true appreciation of the core values of the people working within the organization. In order to change these values and create a strong internal accountability the leader/manager needs to allow people to live the espoused theory over time. Within a university where there are a myriad of cultures and where external stakeholders are constantly changing espoused theories it becomes all the more important that a core set of values are made explicit and are aligned to internal

processes so that the university works as one rather than being fractious as shown in Reflection One. Changing norms does not happen overnight and therefore constantly reacting to the external environment means that cultural unity is difficult to establish.

The development of a systemic approach has proven to be a vital tool in making espoused theory explicit by placing core values at the heart of the system. This was particularly highlighted in Reflection Three. A holistic systemic approach also ensures that there is a clear link between aims, strategy and operational management. Placing systems theory within the educational context also raises interesting questions. Whilst this paper makes a case for the development of a closed system within an educational context in order to strengthen internal accountability further reflections amongst education practitioners could help to identify if this could happen in reality.

The paper also demonstrates where there are synergies with established organizational leadership and management practice e.g. recognition of cultures and placing emphases on core values, and where there are differences due to the educational context e.g. the recognition of the impact 'The Children' have on a university. Further investigation is needed to refute or endorse proposals made in the paper.

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