Engineering compliance and worker resistance in UK further education: The creation of the Stepford lecturer

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ENGINEERING COMPLIANCE AND WORKER RESISTANCE IN UK FURTHER EDUCATION: THE CREATION OF THE STEPFORD LECTURER

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INTRODUCTION

The film "Stepford Wives" focussed on the lives of women in a fictitious American suburb who happily subscribed to a division of labour premised on their meeting their husbands' needs: they engaged in acceptable women's societies and were clothed according to protocols around how "feminine", "attractive" (to men) women should dress. As the plot unfolds it becomes apparent that the women are robots, constructed and controlled by powerful men to serve their needs. As new men join the community they quickly succumb to the allure of having docile, subservient, well-dressed, well-behaved and attractive wives. The experiment falters when one woman, a new resident, questions the behaviours of her friends and neighbours, and ultimately uncovers the sinister programme led by the men "at the lodge".

This is a narrative taken from a film: a story of control and of conformity to preconceived notions of what it is to be a perfect woman, wife, mother and a female member of a community, as defined by a group of powerful men. It was during our research in the Further Education (FE) sector that this narrative surfaced as not one, but three lecturers referred to being required to become a "Stepford lecturer". This fictional allegory provides the impetus to this paper which explores attempts to engineer consent to change in two FE colleges. Underlying developments in each college was a senior management view that lecturers both need to be, and can be, "aligned" to some form of unifying "can do" culture or behavioural stereotype. Implicit within this is the notion of realigning and re-educating lecturers, and their immediate managers, to accept and conform to new ways of working, behaving and thinking. What this means in practice is that lecturers are expected to perform in prescribed ways, as defined by a dominant managerial discourse. A useful way of conceptualising this is through Ball's (2003, p.216) analysis of "performativity", which he

defined as "a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change" in which the compliant "performances" of individuals judged through the eyes of their managers serve as proxy measures of productivity or organisational worth. Ball comments that the issue of who controls the field of judgement in which these assessments are made is crucial. He notes from his own research that teachers had found that their previously held values had been "displaced by the terrors of performativity" (p216).

Recent developments in New Public Management (NPM) (Ferlie et al, 1996; Greuning, 2001; Hood 1995) as applied within the UK FE sector can be conceptualised as one aspect of the Taylorisation debate: specifically, the separation of management decision making from task execution and, perhaps more important, the emboldening and reifying of managerialism and a new cadre of managers in a public service setting (Worrall et al, 2010). As Cooper and Taylor (2000) pointed out, the separation of task conception from task execution serves two purposes: it cheapens and degrades labour and it facilitates management control. Our argument is that the associated preoccupation with performance, and specifically its management and measurement, is a natural outcome of the logic of NPM which has come to dominate in ways that have "affected workers' experiences of work as the locus of control over the pace and nature of jobs has become increasingly contested" (Worrall et al 2010, p.118). Recently, there has been an expansion in the number[1] and organisational prominence of senior managers who, we argue, have attempted to realign workers' attitudes through multi-layered processes of organisational change (Worrall and Cooper, 2007)[2]. This change usually involves significant restructuring interwoven with culture change initiatives, often led by external consultants. As a result of these processes, new groups of managers are created that are expected to behave in particular ways, espouse corporate values and be "part of the management team".

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[1] A comparison of Labour Force Survey data for 2001 and 2010 reveals that the number of senior administrators in educational establishments in the UK increased by 56% (from 25,000 in 2001 to 39,000 in 2010 – see http://www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/Product.asp?vlnk=14248 accessed 6th April 2011)

[2] In a 2007 study, Worrall and Cooper identified that 65% of respondents from the UK education sector had experienced some form of organisational change in the year prior to their survey: of these 60% worked in organisations where culture change programmes had been implemented. The negative effects of change programmes were considerable in all sectors but were perceived more negatively in the education sector than elsewhere: as a result of change, 77% of education sector respondents reported reduced morale, 75% reported a reduced sense of job security and 53% felt that change had increased the pressure upon them to work longer hours. (The equivalent figures for the whole sample were: reduced morale - 69%; reduced sense of job security - 64%; and, increased pressure to work longer hours - 44%.)

Our aim is not to generalise about these broader developments but to provide a detailed commentary of the implementation of, and experience of, New Public Management in a particular public sector context from the polarised perspectives of the senior managers seeking to implement change and the lecturers who were, in the main, sceptical of the espoused benefits of change. Our focus is on attempts to engineer culture change in two FE colleges and how this can be located within theoretical debates about the means of controlling behaviours and attitudes within organisations.

Our conceptualisation draws on the notion of performativity but our focus lies less with the monitoring systems and production of information discussed in Ball's (2003) paper: we focus on the ways in which senior managers have sought to construct and embed their view of "new", "positive" corporate cultures as a means of securing docile, compliant lecturers who are less resistant to change. We argue that this approach has powerful Taylorite antecedents ("one best way"), and equally powerful consequences in terms of what does and does not get valued in the lecturer labour process.   While managerialist literature and the organisational development consultancy propaganda that accompanies it[3] [4] make much of the positive outcomes of culture building (Brook and Pioch, 2006) these cultural engineering interventions can be viewed as a powerful means of "indoctrination and social assimilation" (Edwards 1995 p.53). Our purpose is to illuminate the ways in which senior management teams have sought to re-educate, or, using our Stepford metaphor, to reprogramme lecturers to comply with a newly defined "corporate way". In so doing, we provide a critical perspective on the received wisdom of investing in stylised, faddish change programmes that ostensibly promise to win hearts and minds but only serve further to alienate and disempower those they purport to engage and empower.

The paper is organised as follows: in the first main section, we develop our theoretical framework and discuss the changing FE context in which our research was conducted; in the second section, we present the methods employed to collect and interpret data; in the third section, we present and discuss our findings before making our concluding remarks.

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[3] http://www.cipd.co.uk/training/PSYPOCC/about.htm Accessed 6th April 2011
[4] http://www.cipd.co.uk/Bookstore/_catalogue/CorporateAndHRStrategy/9781843981947.htm
Accessed 6th April 2011

CONTEXT AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

FE, like the majority of public services is labour intensive, thereby rendering the labour problem (perceived poor productivity and performance) particularly important (Mather and Seifert 2011; Worrall et al. 2010). The iterations of reform that have affected public services since the 1980s have been predicated on building business-like, responsive working practices associated with perceived private sector good practice and the introduction of market disciplines. This is informed by neoliberal accounts of the inherent shortcomings of public sector provision that have driven changes to how services are organised and delivered (Dunleavy et al. 2006; Newman and Clarke 2009; Pollitt and Hupe 2011). Debates about the negative impact of these changes on public sector workers and their experience of employment abound (Ashworth and Entwistle 2011; Diefenbach 2009). However, Lapsley (2009, p.1) exposed that new approaches to managing in the public sector had been a "cruel disappointment" in many of the government bodies that had so readily engaged with them: his findings have been reinforced by several studies across the public sector (see Smith et al. 2008; Rosenthal and Peccei 2006; and Danford et al. 2011).

These accounts lend weight to the view that the language and the practices currently associated with labour management in the public sector are underpinned by a belief that more and stronger management leads to improved performance. Indeed Fox (1966) emphasised the importance of the legitimising role played by management ideology in labour management, pointing out that Taylor himself assumed that the adoption of scientific management would eliminate the need for unions and worker voice. The use and application of such unitarist ideals within management communications provides a means of upholding and asserting the primacy of management prerogative. These ideals are the basis of what Spicer and Bohm (2006) refer to as "the discourse of management" which they argue produces "a world which is amenable to control by managers and technologies of management" (2006 p.1). This is a theme echoed by Ball (2003) in his discussion of the "terrors of performativity". As Spicer and Bohm (2006) note, this does not necessarily imply that workers acquiesce as there are many forms of overt and covert resistance exercised in contemporary workplaces (Roscigno and Hodson, 2004; Bain and Taylor, 2000; Vallas, 2003). However, the main point, we contend, is that such resistance stimulates more intensive and invasive managerial interventions to create and sustain the control mechanisms needed to resolve the perceived problems of poor productivity and performance. As we argue

elsewhere these are regarded by neoliberal, market-centred commentators and academics to be a particular and unwelcome feature of labour intensive public services in general (Worrall et al. 2010) and within the education sector in particular (Mather and Seifert 2011).

It is against this backdrop that our study was conducted. The Further and Higher Education Act (FHEA) 1992 wrought significant structural and financial changes across the sector, creating autonomous college "business units" as part of the process of incorporation. This stimulated business management functions under the guidance of empowered governing bodies, it stimulated competition between colleges and, most important, it stimulated a rapid growth and spread of managerialism across the sector (Gleeson and Shain 1999; Mather et al, 2007 and 2009). Prior to incorporation one might characterise FE college management as operating within a pluralist framework which involved some notion of a common occupational basis with lecturers, administrators and a small number of senior staff generally coalescing around educational values relating to students and serving the local community. The regulation of college budgets and monitoring the quality of provision were largely the preserve of the relevant Local Education Authority (LEA) with college principals steering the institution in an academic sense, and lecturers getting on with the job of teaching students. The development of the FE sector is marked by successive ministerial interventions bent on flexing FE offerings to meet shifting local labour market priorities (Avis, 2005). That the sector proved relatively flexible and adaptable to such changes bears testimony to the internal resilience of college staff communities and a labour management framework rooted in pluralist ideals. This set of institutional arrangements appears to have delivered some sense of shared purpose around the nature, purpose and performance (success) of an FE college in its local community. It also had the effect of locating disputes over wages, work and budgets outside the college while at the same time providing the mechanisms for resolving them. Of particular note was the relative absence of whole cadres of management, of business management functions and of high profile "performativity" metrics. Under this regime, labour management matters were the preserve of local education authority (LEA) personnel departments and informal relations between teaching staff and curricular heads. Despite this, and according to the neoliberal logic, the FE model was deemed not to be working and this has provided the legitimising strand to twenty five years of imposed changes to the sector that have sought to embed a managerialist agenda rooted in unitarist ideals for delivering changes in the organisation and management of the FE labour force. This has been manifest in a sustained attempt to undermine the main

lecturers' trade union, partly achieved through the erosion of national collective bargaining. In line with the general thrust of public service reform, the consequences have been the empowering of college managers who have become accountable to a succession of ministerially-devised quangos.

There are several accounts of growing managerialism in education generally (Seddon, 1997) and FE specifically (Randle and Brady, 1997; Gleeson and Shain, 1999). Others have sought to explain the diffuse nature of "professionalism" as applied to FE lecturers (Robson 1988) and to explore difficulties associated with accounts of the impact of reform on lecturers' professional autonomy and identity (Gleeson et al. 2005). Hidden in such accounts is evidence of burgeoning management hierarchies and attendant requirements on lecturers to perform in particular ways. Our earlier work suggests that lecturers see themselves as professional educators (Mather et al, 2007) with a strong sense of commitment to students. As such, the lecturers legitimise their resistance to managerialism by claiming that they are the best arbiters in matters relating to the best interests of "their" students. They then use this to denounce and undermine managerially-devised change initiatives which, they argue, will impact negatively on students. All of this complicates the debate about resistance and how it is conceptualised and acted upon both by senior managers and by the lecturers themselves as change and resistance to change are conflated with debates about who is acting in students' best interest, in what Ball refers to as struggles that "are often internalized and set the care of the self against duty to others" (2003 p.216).

The sector is now characterised by managers who are subject to intense pressures to provide evidence that they are managing each institution effectively as judged by external audits and inspections, with the added bite that funding is dependent on achieving targets. As senior managers drive their organisations to meet performance targets and financial goals to secure future funding, they are faced with the problem of winning staff over to a managerial discourse about which most lecturing staff are highly sceptical. Indeed, many college managers find themselves in a paradoxical position: they are accountable to ministers rather than to their staff and local communities and many have found that the need to meet financial goals such as generating efficiencies (a euphemism for cost cutting) sits uncomfortably with meeting social goals such as responding to community needs, and providing second chances to students already bruised by less than optimal educational experiences. They are confronted by lecturers who exhibit a set of priorities often

articulated as maintaining services to students *in spite of or in the face of* management interventions designed to improve efficiency/reduce costs or maintain professional standards. It is in this context, and in light of the historical patterns of labour management regulation and lecturers' "professionalism", that managerialism and the architectures of workplace control which surface in our findings need to be understood and interpreted.

The point is one of control – and in particular, efforts to control lecturer labour. The issue of managerial control in general and increasing managerial control over the lecturer labour process in particular is pivotal to our study. We are concerned to develop a deeper insight into how attempts to control how lecturers are expected to behave and perform are legitimised and how managers endeavour to persuade, cajole or coerce the managed into accepting such control. Both Edwards (1979) and Kaufman (2008) argue that the need for control is a feature of the structural inequalities embedded within the employment relationship and that this relationship is characterised by its lack of precision about levels of productivity and performance. Management of the employment relationship therefore relies on securing both controls over and consent from labour, which translates into various carrot and stick labour management interventions (Fox 1974). Control manifests itself in a variety of ways: personal, technical, technological, bureaucratic and cultural (Thompson and Harley, 2007; Thompson and McHugh, 2009). Reed has provided a detailed account of how these various "control logics and forms" (2011 p.42) have developed to create "a new morphology" of forms of control comprising "hybridized control regimes" (p.43). The message to emerge is that coercion alone does not work as workers resist both individually and collectively: this requires more imaginative management interventions based on securing willing workers and consensual relations between managers and the managed. Workplace regimes are therefore predicated on a myriad of different control mechanisms but as Thompson and Van de Broek (2010) observe "all control practices have normative dimensions" (p.6) and extend beyond simple task allocation decisions to include forms of managerial control that are "directed towards engagement with and intended transformation of employee values, identity or emotions". They add that such "controls are the most difficult to devise and operationalise" (p.6).

The concern of this paper is with one aspect of such control in the FE workplace – what Reed (2011) refers to as "cultural reengineering". Fleming and Sturdy (2009) suggest that the management of culture is a rhetorical act to engineer compliance which has less to do with

direct control over task performance and task delivery and more to do with legitimising management and reducing resistance to change. Etherington (2009) highlighted the importance of frameworks of control based on self-regulation through the language and culture-building rubric of empowerment. In his study of the reproduction of quality regimes in the Scottish Further Education sector he observes how the language of empowerment is used as an ideological device – "winning hearts and minds through ideological means is considered as integral in regime compliance" (p.8). In this sense the metaphors and language of empowerment, positive corporate cultures and excellence are consistent with the construction of consent or hegemony (Gramsci, 1988).

The impetus to this paper lay in references to the "Stepford lecturer" and the implications of this analogy as it encapsulated a key theme that had surfaced around the contested nature of performance in the FE workplace, and perhaps more important, who claimed control over this aspect of the lecturer labour process. Our point, in line with Ball (2003), is that within the FE regime the new vocabulary of performance rendered old ways of thinking "dated or redundant or even obstructive". It became clear in the early analysis stage that a range of management interventions had been deployed to address the perceived problems of lecturer resistance, unreasonableness, lack of compliance and inflexibility with senior managers seeming to focus their efforts on reengineering these professionals in ways more aligned with individualised, performance-driven "corporate cultures". As Ball argues, this may be understood in a Foucauldian sense as empowering managers as the "technicians of behaviour" in the workplace, while at the same time producing compliant, docile and, one might argue, deprofessionalised workers.

The analytical framework used to examine these debates draws broadly on Ball (2003). He suggests that reform in education has been premised on a new form of control or regulation based on introducing management technologies to align institutions with "the methods, culture and ethical system of the private sector" (p.216). He points out that these technologies encompass various elements including the redesign of procedures, motivational strategies and "mechanisms of reformation or therapy" (p.216) and argues that the reform process provides the space for "a new regulative ensemble which is an impoverished mix of physical, textual and moral elements" (p.217). This is important in helping to shape findings from our research as it became clear that some lecturers felt that attempts were being made to reengineer them to behave, think and act in particular, and for

them, unpalatable ways - hence their invocation of the Stepford lecturer metaphor. In our analysis, we used aspects of Ball's (2003) analysis to highlight how a range of structural and cultural interventions had been used to attempt to reify compliant behavioural forms and embed them with organisational practices. However, our prime concern here is not just with the technologies of implementation, to use Ball's terms, but with how managers enact them, with how lecturers make sense of them, and with exploring the conflict between the two apparently polarised views.

METHOD

Our data are drawn on findings from two discrete studies in English FE colleges. The first study was undertaken in 2008-2009 and sought to explore the nature and experiences of labour management and changing labour process in the FE sector in light of ministerial pressures on budget and policy priorities that had become evident post the 2004 Act. Data were collected from a variety of sources but primarily from forty in-depth interviews with managers and lecturers conducted in two colleges in the West Midlands. Twenty four interviews were completed in College A and sixteen in College B. College documents and other artefacts were also analysed. This approach offered rich insights into the subjective experiences of those working in different capacities in the colleges. Other insights were gained by one of the researchers taking the role of observer and participant in a staff development day.

The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed using NVIVO software. Preliminary analysis of the data revealed emergent themes concerned with performance, performance management and, in particular, a preoccupation among managers with the cultivation of certain cultural norms, creating corporate cultures, identifying "good lecturers", and tackling "laggards". In turn, some lecturers referred to feeling like "Stepford lecturers" – an allusion to feeling that they had to behave in particular ways while at work and in ways that suggested surface compliance and the suppression of overt resistance. This theme surfaced again in interviews conducted with lecturers during 2011 at one of these colleges. This research is still ongoing but, at the time of writing, eight in-depth interviews had been conducted with managers and lecturers and a structured analysis of college policy documents had been undertaken. A preliminary analysis of the 2011 interviews revealed significant overlaps with the material collected in 2008-9 around the theme of

performativity. However, our aim here is to illuminate workplace experiences and link them to broader structural and ideological imperatives that impact at the institutional level (Edwards 2005).

FINDINGS

Drawing on Ball (2003) we present our findings under two broad areas: namely, the structural and cultural interventions that surfaced in each college. In each college senior management aims were the same - to reduce resistance to change at the chalk face. Unlike Stepford wives, lecturers were not unquestioning and not entirely compliant. Underlying developments in each college was an explicit attempt by the senior management to devise and implement change programmes or as one senior manager (College B) put it, "getting everyone on board … we need to operate differently and the traditional way of doing things is a bit clunky, to put it mildly". Managers in both colleges emphasised the need to change and expressed this in terms of being more flexible, responsive, consumer-focussed and forward looking. Analysis suggests that senior managers saw change largely in terms of the need to re-educate employees into not only new ways of working but also new ways of behaving within the organisation. This was often articulated in terms of cultivating "can-do" attitudes among lecturers to displace what senior managers saw as resistant behaviours. As one senior manager in College A explained, "It's resistance all the way and it comes from below. The people know how to do it, they just don't want to do it and it's how do you break that thing down? Getting people to think outside the box in FE is nigh on impossible".

Structural changes – empowering managers and destabilising lecturers

Restructuring was an integral feature in both colleges in 2008-2009. The restructuring served two purposes: first, the further strengthening of the management tiers and functions of both colleges; and, second, the reorganisation of well-established subject groups. In College A, a restructuring had been implemented several years earlier, following a merger between two pre-existing colleges but there had been a subsequent restructuring because, as a senior manager explained, "we needed to align ourselves better to what was needed" and become more "customer and outward focussed". The reorganising of subject groups had created an underlying fear among lecturers – the fear of being "closed down if there's a bad inspection". Interviews conducted in 2011 revealed that curriculum areas had been

reorganised several times since 2009. The continual reorganisation destabilised lecturers, making it more difficult for them to resist change in an organisation where the sands were continually shifting.

On a more subtle level there were continual attempts to restructure lecturers' timetables in order to change their job content. Some lecturers had been told to assume responsibility for work-based vocational courses which conflicted with both their subject specialism and their college-based role. Senior managers presented this as needing to be more flexible. In 2009, the college introduced a workforce plan designed to match lecturers' capabilities to forecast demand. As the HR director commented, vocational courses are "assessor driven and not lecturer driven… I think this will mean a shift in staffing levels". A faculty director noted that lecturers' contractual "strait-jacket" and their salary costs were constraints that reduced flexibility in the college – "I suppose you could foresee the time when you will have two separate workforces in FE. One deals with the traditional work, and one operates in the real world". From this we conclude that the faculty director did not see "traditional work" as existing in the "real world". Another senior manager commented "I have to ask whether we've got the right sort of staff now for what we need". This concern between lack of fit between the "demands of the real world" and lecturers' skills and attitudes remained a feature of management planning in 2011, where there was evidence that senior management intended to revisit the lecturers' contracts with the aim of enabling the tighter management of lecturers' time and activities. We argue that this level of scrutiny over what lecturers actually do runs counter to notions of "can-do" and "empowering" cultures that senior managers purported to espouse. We felt we had uncovered managerial double-speak where their rhetoric about empowerment was designed to cloak the continual disempowerment of lecturers as the locus of control shifted from the professional to a cadre of senior managers.

One consequence of requiring more contractual flexibility from lecturers was the cultivation of fear and insecurity which served to destabilise this group of workers. Lecturers saw these moves as threatening and articulated this in terms of challenges to their professionalism. As one lecturer put it, "I understand why they're doing it but it seems a shame to me that we don't have room for poets, painters and philosophers as well as bricklayers and hairdressers". Some managers used disparaging terms such as "inflexible", "laggards", "luddites", "donkeys", "traditionalists", "difficult", "the cholesterol that furs up the arteries"

and "deadwood" to describe lecturers who resisted indicating that this group of lecturers was operating in "a silo mentality". These lecturers were referred to as "childish", with one manager wanting to "snatch their dummies away" to achieve compliance. These terms were commonly used by senior managers to explain lecturers' resistance to change and their perceived lack of contractual, attitudinal and behavioural flexibility. One manager was even more explicit:

> "Give me a list and I'd scrub off 50 people [lecturers]. I could do it easily and they wouldn't be missed. What we need is people from industry. We've brought some in and taught them to be trainers .. all we had to do was teach them how to assess. Not only did it make them cheaper, but it usually meant there wasn't a union affiliation so they were prepared to be flexible about what they did, how they did it, when they did it" (Cross-College Manager, College A).

Similarly, College B had been through a major restructuring exercise facilitated by external consultants in 2004–6. Interviews revealed that this had been significant in emboldening a new management team, weakening what had been a small union branch and cultivating a more compliant workforce. One lecturer stated "it was awful. Two consultants came in; I think they were sort of named the hit men". A director conceded that "it was all a bit frightening for everybody" but noted that "we brought in a consultant so that he could take the blame with him when he left". Examination of the restructuring exercise, badged as a "curriculum review", suggested that it was concerned with reconfiguring management roles and, more important, appointing new managers to the college who were able "to better promote the brand". Another senior manager confirmed that when she joined the college in 2006 more than fifty per cent of college management team were new to the post and were "young junior managers who had £5000-£6000 pay rises on appointment". She explained how the new principal had restructured:

> "he brought in a group of people together who not only bonded but bought into his vision – so we're all kind of young in terms of our experience but hungry and keen. I think we all maybe worked harder to get on and roll out this vision, because we wanted to prove ourselves in our new position".

Another senior manager explained:

> "We've done a complete curriculum review led by the senior management team which has meant that staff have gone through restructuring, applying for jobs, redundancies in some cases, new staff have come in. We've had massive changes in that sense and staff have worked through that. But I feel at this point now we're at a stage where we have got good teams in place, we have got a vision for the College and it's much improved and we are pushing forward".

Restructuring had elevated the importance of the HR function, as witnessed by the appointment of a new HR director. She explained that she had developed a new management competency framework to encourage particular types of behaviours: "we're looking for entrepreneurship, creativity, leadership and behavioural aspects".

A lecturer saw things differently, noting both the inevitable restructuring that always followed a new senior management appointment and the resultant impact of restructuring: "it severely damaged the confidence of several colleagues around me, and I think to this day it still does and it has damaged me as well". She explained that feeling damaged had arisen from what she thought was a more pernicious rationale for restructuring than that espoused by senior managers:

> "it was introduced as a curriculum review and we were told that everything was up for change and the job that you had you no longer have … basically the whole workforce was made redundant. We were all interviewed again for our jobs. The posts that were up in the new restructure, everybody could apply for them, so you suddenly found yourself, that there could be hourly paid staff who hadn't got a permanent contract applying for a post that really was your job … their jobs haven't changed whatsoever. So that was a tool used for something else".

She argued that restructuring had been seen by many as a tool to get rid of "difficult staff" (especially union activists) and to replace them with cheaper "more grateful staff" that had previously been hourly paid. There were several consequences of this: first, a newly created internal division of labour had been created that was based less on collegial values and more on internal competitive rivalries rooted in class-based teachers versus those with a practitioner background (or "the real world" as some managers labelled it); second, the

college had reduced its labour costs by replacing more senior workers with less costly employees; and, third lecturing staff had become increasingly aware of the futility of engaging in acts of formal, unionised resistance (this had also been made more difficult by the loss of staff who had been union activists). As another lecturer explained:

> "There were job losses but within months, there was employment, they were taking on full time members of staff in areas where there were job losses. I would say they had key people they wanted to get rid of. The long term effect has been to encourage a climate of fear and insecurity".

Similar views surfaced in comments about a new building programme that the college was planning. This was seen by senior managers to provide further opportunities for "staff culling": "We're looking at the new £64 million build and necessarily we're wanting to change some of the working practices to bring it up to the 21st century campus" as "there are just tacit and historical processes that need to be re-engineered".

The implication is that senior management were keen to reduce what were perceived as barriers to change by undermining lecturers' ability to resist. Our analysis revealed a distinct trend: a real sense of the empowerment of management against the backdrop of the disempowerment of lecturers which was being delivered through a process of destabilisation involving the threat of job loss designed to create increased feelings of job and role insecurity. We contend that the restructuring and re-engineering of lecturers' contractual duties amounted to an emboldening of senior managers wherein lecturers' resistance, however manifested, could be rationalised as inflexible, unwarranted behaviour. Changes were presented as empowering lecturers to embrace new ways of working but instead only served to destabilise and disenfranchise lecturers. The language and rhetoric of change as presented by senior college managers can be understood as an assertion of power, especially when juxtaposed against the disempowering of the lecturers. For example, two senior managers from College A commented that

> "they're a big, big barrier for us – huge. They don't like the travelling or they don't like to go out on site, or whatever they complain about. We're going to have to force all this and change their opinion" and "they're just moaning gits who are too laid back when they need to be on the ball" (Faculty Director, College A).

Such comments contrast with lecturers' views, where one said, "we're just feeling absolutely over-worked, over-burdened and worn out". Another said he felt fearful about redundancy, adding "I've taken on extra roles because I want to safeguard my employment". Lecturers were mistrustful of senior managers and spoke of them being "remote" and that they felt "detached from what is going on at SMT (Senior Management Team) level". One explained that her approach was to "just comply and keep my head down".

Senior managers dealt with perceived lecturers' recalcitrance by drawing on a range of metaphors that both reified the dominant managerial view while also reinforcing the positional power of senior managers and the downward nature of communications. These sound-bite metaphors revealed a senior management mindset that appeared to be far removed from many of the lecturers. One senior manager from College A referred to the management team as "a flock of flamingos … they take off together and once they are in the air they fly in a sustainable way" and another spoke of "singing off the same hymn sheet". Similarly in College B a senior manager explained his approach to strategy formulation and getting staff on board: "what I'm doing is putting a story down … the model I see is that [he drew a diagram on a scrap of paper] – this is a chocolate fountain". The allusion to the chocolate fountain is suggestive of a top-down cascade of good ideas that are dipped into, and one assumes, enjoyed by staff lower down the hierarchy. It is interesting to observe his view of the real world as encapsulated in a chocolate fountain, given the allusions earlier in this paper to lecturers needing to get into the real (non-traditional?) world. The same manager added that all staff had to develop "their world, attached to that [the fountain] in some way … so that the core of this organisation is attuned and aligned". The picture that emerged was one of managers "getting on board" and the language was one of alignment, conformity and "being attuned". Interviews suggested that lecturers were less convinced of this world view. As one commented, "I think in the wee small hours of the morning when they are actually thinking their own private thoughts, I really do think they are more or less saying, why won't these bastards do what I tell them?" One senior manager in College B analysed this apparent resistance simply as the challenge of communication:

> "I sometimes get a bit shocked by what some of the lecturers come out with – it's not actually filtered all the way down to that level. I think it's making sure that we're feeding all the way through the organisation".

These findings suggest that lecturer performativity is defined by the perceived need to conform to management stereotypes about being a "flexible lecturer" in which senior management seem to have conflated "conformity" with "flexibility". It also suggests a form of insidious coercion by means of fear through the reification of management power and the cultivation of fear of job loss. The findings highlight the polarised views of managers and managed, while also focussing on the problematic nature of resistance. Lecturers did not buy in to the dominant managerial view, in marked contrast to the docile, robotised Stepford wives. The findings also revealed a managerial discourse littered with unitarist-informed metaphors and strategy planning tools that marked a sharp contrast with the college management models that had been a feature of the pre-incorporation period.

Technologies of implementation

The technologies of implementation were apparent in a variety of forms including performance management regimes and the use of targets to cultivate particular kinds of behaviours and "good" performance (Ball 2003). Ball suggests that while these interventions have, on the surface, "the appearance of rationality and objectivity" (p.221) they impact at a deeper, psychological level on the emotions and lived experiences of those at the receiving end. In both colleges formal performance management (PM) regimes were seen as key to cultivating improved levels of lecturer performance and, we argue, conformity. There were varying levels of sophistication in each scheme, with the colleges in 2009 drawing on fairly rudimentary "appraisal-style" models which focused on "weeding out poor performance". Interview data and policy documents indicate that the PM scheme at College A had been substantially refined over the three years since 2008 to look "at personal attributes" (School Leader). She added that the focus lay in assessing personal behaviours and the supporting documentation refers to attributes such as "respect", "student focus" and "empowerment". Interviews with lecturers suggested that they remained suspicious of the purpose of PM and were dismissive of the vocabulary used in the documentation. The PM scheme illustrated the polarised views of senior managers and lecturers: one lecturer argued "chopping and changing never really improves anything, it just replaces one system that's not working with a new one that's not understood".

Analysis of college documentation underlined a concerted effort to appraise and manage desirable behaviours and attitudes based on a standardised view of what it meant to be a "good" lecturer. Implicit within this is compliance and conformity with the managerially defined metrics that were used to performance manage lecturers. The consequences of a poor performance review were explained in developmental terms, with coaching and mentoring interventions used to bring staff "up to standard". If these measures failed, then the capability policy and procedure were triggered. Unsurprisingly, lecturers had learnt to "play the game" (Lecturer College A) but lecturers' responses suggested low-level, surface compliance with a managerially-devised PM scheme. Game playing and surface compliance were understandable as overt non-compliance carried punitive sanctions. The PM scheme relied on the cultivation of particular ways of behaving, as defined by senior managers, who had the power to redefine these terms. We felt this was entirely consistent with our Stepford metaphor.

Despite the veneer of compliance, some lecturers demonstrated that they were capable of more overt forms of dissent. Collective mobilisation within the union was seen as "pointless" in both colleges: one lecturer (College A) noted, "in terms of collectivism there's none". This was a common perception across both colleges and particularly in college B where union activity had been significantly diluted during restructurings. Individualised aspects of dissent were clear from lecturers' interviews and these rendered management efforts to cultivate docility and compliance more difficult. As a consequence, managers in both colleges were clear that they wanted to resolve the problem by "changing the culture". This phrase emerged in a majority of interviews and numerous references were made in management planning documents to the need for each college "to have an adaptive culture", "to have a new culture" and "to find new ways of doing things". The discourse of management-driven culture change dominated interviews with senior managers. As Ball notes this is "about constructing new forms of institutional affiliation and community, based on corporate culture (2003 p.219). Discussions with senior managers led us to believe that they thought that culture change would only be brought about by embedding control mechanisms and performance management structures that sought to weaken individual resistance, to dilute job security, and to engineer the "right" behaviours.

Developments in College A provided a clear example of an explicit managed attempt to tackle what were perceived to be problems with the college's culture. In 2008, the college

had undertaken a culture change programme that, as one manager explained, sought to address weaknesses in extant management tools and techniques for driving up performance. The problem, he averred, lay in staff inertia, unwillingness to engage, recalcitrance, and, at times, open resistance to "inevitable" changes. He explained that the major culture change initiative (which was labelled "the programme") was about making lecturers "more flexible and positive". Interview material about this initiative provided insights into the simultaneous organisational reification of management values and the devaluing of the status of many experienced lecturers. The organisation-wide change initiative was described as empowering and forward thinking by senior managers who felt that the desire to "modernise" meant that the college had to "use modern tools to deal with modern problems" (Senior Manager, College, A). The culture change programme had commenced six months prior to the research study in 2009 and it emerged as a central focus in interviews with senior managers. One explained that the Principal had engaged an external consultancy to undertake a survey which had revealed what he termed "a negative culture". The remedy lay, he believed, in engaging the consultants to implement a culture change programme based on American–style pseudo-psychological analysis. Volunteer college managers (all levels) attended a four day, intensive training session led by the consultancy team. The HR Director explained:

> "the whole programme was very fascinating, it was four days, two sets of two days and it was about concentrating on yourself and the impact that you have and trying to get away from the blame culture, trying to work towards a self-actualising culture. So just really trying to move people into their own energy, into their own space to show them what they can do if they want to do it".

This was seen to be the antidote to resistance to change and to challenging what was described as "a blame culture", "a laid-back culture" and "us and them attitudes to work".

Another manager explained that once this first stage had been completed there was a college conference where:

> "we [the managers who had been on the course] gave …. mini seminars on what we were trying to do, we were trying to announce to everybody, and a lot of staff thought it was brilliant, but the majority of the staff were like, why are we doing

> this, this is ridiculous. And not really buying into what we were trying to do. I think the negativity is quite shocking sometimes … So it's trying to change that, and I think with [the Principal] bringing in the [culture change consultancy] and a culture change, hopefully, that might be able to address some of that issue. I think sometimes management-wise in the past it has not been very strong, whereas at the moment it's getting a lot better".

The language of the culture programme conceptualised and expressed the need for change in benign terms such as "to try and focus everyone on having a vision of getting somewhere together" (School Leader). There was a sense that this initiative was concerned with gaining buy-in from a newly created cadre of managers who were straddling the divide between management and lecturing. For example, newly created teaching advisors and those with junior cross college roles had been included and those interviewed seemed positive:

> "I feel this training will have a positive effect as well, because it's looking at the personal centred approach - management are doing it as well and eventually the students are going to all do it. So hopefully that's going to foster like a real cultural change in college. So the only way they can do that is by fostering this sort of general attitude across college".

What she meant by "general attitude" concurs with unitarist notions of the relationship between managers and managed. The general attitude meant reducing resistance to change and cultivating more managerial and more business-like behaviours. One school leader captured this when noting that "there's going to have been some considerable change - if it's going to have to be a "can do" attitude by everybody. If you're looking to actually make it look like perfect to the customer, we've got to make some massive changes in the systems that we've got". It was clear from our analysis that lower level managers endured significant workload pressures as they sought to accommodate pressures from above and from below. They nevertheless appeared to acquiesce to the managerial discourse, so as one school leader (College A) commented, "there's a need to join up the dots. If we're going to move on, everyone's got to move on". The higher up the college hierarchy, the more convinced interviewees became about feeling empowered, positive and supportive of the changes being enacted. The HR Director was forthright:

> "I'm very much of the view that if you are going to have this change in culture and the values and beliefs are going to have that shift, those people that don't want to come along with that are not the people that you want in your organisation. But what you do about it at the time we'll have to see".

There was an interesting development in plans to roll out the culture change programme as the college could not afford for all staff to attend four days training off-site. Consequently, selected managers were trained to run in-house developmental workshops. One of these managers explained the problems associated with rolling out "the programme" and, in so doing, gave useful insights into what it entailed:

> "When you bring change on people like that at an individual level, there could be some fall out, you could leave people feeling very bad about themselves. And one of the exercises you do is you do this balance wheel and you get to look at what your life relationships are and how strained they are, you do it on a wheel, put different things on the outside and then you kind of grade them on a line as to whether they're good or poor, so the nearer the circle, the poorer the relationship is and his was kind of right round the circle. Now there's a worry there because somebody could go away and look at that and think oh, that would really make you feel bad".

Another manager reported that she had withdrawn from "the programme" as a trainer because she felt ill-equipped to "inflict psychological damage" on her colleagues. Another trainer was concerned that what senior managers expected from her was "difficult" as the programme was very much about "confronting people" who often became "very confrontational with you and the course as well". There was an irony in the way that "the programme" was being implemented as those who had engaged with the initial consultancy-led development days were positively disposed to culture change and the managerial discourse that was associated with it while the staff who were now being required to undergo the in-house version were those who had initially been most resistant to the programme. Somewhat unsurprisingly, one school leader reported that "the programme and those delivering it here suffer a bit on the credibility scale". Lecturers were cynical about "the programme", referring to it as "psycho-babble", "a waste of money" and "depressing". They talked of feeling that they the lecturers (who saw themselves as professional educators) were being treated like children and that their sense of their own professionalism

was being undermined by being over-managed as their degree of control over their own jobs was being eroded. As a consequence they felt that there was a dissonance between what they felt they should do and what they now felt expected to do and between how they felt they should behave and how managers now expected them to behave. For example the culture change programme was badged as empowering lecturers, buttressed by statements of desirable behaviours such as "being flexible and responsive" as part of a "blame free culture". However, lecturers referred to feeling that there was "a definite blame culture" and that they derived pleasure in their job from the students and not from what one called "management gimmicks" with an embedded subtext of work intensification and engineered compliance. As one put it,

> "if your circumstances are that you're sitting in your workroom and your manager is just giving you all the crap, you can't do this, you've got to teach that and you've got to change fundamentally, you're going to get more entrenched – well rather than embracing change you're going to tell them to bugger off aren't you".

Others expressed similar views indicating resistance to what one said was "re-programming" adding "you've seen Stepford Wives haven't you?" He went on to add "So, you're asking people to change their perspective on life and their own personal beliefs for the sake of an institution. And that's not going to happen". Lecturers felt that culture change was something that was being done to them from above and something they did not identify with: "I think the vast majority just think it's quite amusing, or it's... I'm not getting involved in that". While one is respondent did talk of needing to think about things in new ways and of needing to be involved in changes she was critical of "the programme":

> "it's not going to work …… I just think it's pushed down from the top and I think if you're going to change the culture of the College, it's got to come from the bottom, not from the top. So I think a lot of people just see it as, oh, it's another thing they're making us do".

One school leader, making a link between the programme and 1980s management fads, was dismissive of the associated rhetoric "They may as well get the staff out there doing star-jumps, it's 1980s Japanese management ..... some managers are so evangelistic about it. Constant positivity and all that. That's where you have a problem, it's very kind of American

evangelistic". A lecturer thought that the college managers were trying to appear "softer" but that this was just about getting lecturers to be more compliant and amenable – he went on to comment that "you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar don't you".

Research in 2011 revealed that "the programme" was still in place, but was certainly afforded far less explicit attention in interviews and college documents. However, the core of the newly devised performance management scheme was now rooted in the language and desirable behaviours that had first featured in "the programme" with far more emphasis being placed on the technologies associated with performance management as a means of cultivating the desirable behaviours that "the programme" had previously defined. The Stepfordisation programme was proceeding apace.

CONCLUSIONS

Our aim has been to develop new insights into the ways in which managers and lecturers have engaged in defining how the values and attitudes to lecturers' work should evolve. Developments in the two colleges we examined have been multi-facetted and point to a complex picture of what can happen when consent is fragile and when managerial coercion for lecturers to change has perverse but, perhaps, predictable consequences. When overt coercion failed, there were attempts to construct consent to unpalatable changes but these also faltered as lecturers resisted while masking their resistance with a veneer of superficial acquiescence. The purpose of the paper has been to highlight why and how college managers sought to build consent among lecturers in the context of a set of imposed values that were derived from "business-like" (real world?) rather than "public service ethos" (un-real world?) views of FE provision. Our key finding is that the management approach rested on "culture change" and "culture building" that were ostensibly framed within the rhetoric of empowering lecturers but, from the lecturers' perspective, were predicated on reducing their resistance to change, defining new and changed behavioural norms and then bringing lecturers "into line" with these new behavioural norms by developing and implementing a performance management regime within which the new managerially-defined, behavioural norms were embedded. This, in lecturers' eyes, constituted the process by which a new breed of Stepford lecturers was being created. While managers in these institutions espoused positive cultural messages, particularly the demise of the blame culture and the empowerment of workers, our data suggest that lecturers had a radically different view

where, in particular, they felt anything but empowered and more at risk of sanction by their non-compliance.   Our findings indicate that low-trust; confrontational relations existed between the college's senior managers and those "at the chalk face"[5].

The underlying aim of managerial interventions, especially performance management, is to provide a cheaper FE service that is of value to local employers and we have argued elsewhere that the performance management of staff has become increasingly important across the public sector (Mather and Seifert 2011; Worrall et al, 2010). A key aspect of all performance management regimes is the desire to align lecturers to business values by privileging and emphasising being "flexible and responsive" and having a "can-do attitude" over the attributes of the value system that many lecturers believe defines them as professionals. Senior college managers have become less accountable to their staff and students and more accountable to central government or its agents. We have found that this re-orientation of senior management accountability has created significant problems for staff the majority of whom felt that their professional value system demanded that their loyalty should be primarily to their students. So how is this paradox in accountability and loyalty managed? Consent and consensus have become scarce commodities in these colleges and so there has been an increased emphasis on aligning hearts and minds through measures designed to increase feelings of insecurity among lecturers while laying down the story of excellent, can-do cultures where all employees are joyfully and uncritically "on message". The prime example of this was "the programme" which was seen as a senior management attempt to re-engineer the culture of a college by engaging consultants to use an "Americanised", evangelical style of delivery that had minimal face validity with the lecturing staff some of whom came to view it as "psychobabble", confrontational and psychologically damaging.

The interventions we have discussed led to two major outcomes: first, the definition and codification of implicit, so-called "desirable" norms which defined the behaviours deemed acceptable and those which were not; and, second, a marked shift in the locus of control as senior management systematically drew towards themselves all decision making not only about what lecturers would deliver but also how they would deliver it and how they would

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[5] A study by Worrall and Cooper (2007) revealed low levels of reciprocal trust in the UK education sector (reciprocal trust was defined as respondents having trust in senior managers and believing that senior managers had trust in them). Their analysis across twenty business sectors revealed that trust in senior management was lower in only the banking and finance and the sales and marketing sectors.

behave within the organisation. We argue that these developments run to the heart of our understanding of control over the lecturer labour process – senior managers have become increasingly concerned with controlling what lecturers do and how they do it and, more importantly, denigrating those who do not comply as "difficult", "luddites", "donkeys", "deadwood", "bastards", "laggards" and "moaning gits". Our analysis reveals the overt castigation of those lecturers who would not comply, or were not seen to comply with managerially ordained new ways of doing things. Indeed, our analysis reveals that restructuring had led to those who were adversely labelled or who were union activists being restructured out of the organisation. Lecturers exhibited what Ball (2003) described as "values schizophrenia" (p.221) as they found that the behaviours that they had traditionally valued as defining their professional practice had been subsumed by ubiquitous management activities that sought to create "a new kind of teacher … a teacher who can maximise performance, who can set aside irrelevant principles, or out-moded social commitments, for whom excellence and improvement are the driving force of their practice" (p.223).

During our study several lecturers invoked the Stepford metaphor to characterise how they felt their role as a lecturer had changed and how they had been subjected to various managerial processes that had become reified in performance management systems. Lecturers overwhelmingly felt that they were being subtly - and not so subtly - forced into adopting norms, attitudes and behaviours which were at odds with their professionally inspired value system. Among lecturer respondents this had led to a sense of "value schizophrenia", to fear about the consequences of non-compliance, to a sense of their roles being destabilised, to a sense of increased job insecurity and to many deciding that superficial compliance was the best survival strategy. They felt that the new cadre of managers that had been created was detached from the reality of the classroom while at the same time this same cadre of managers was criticising lecturers for not living in the real world. Many lecturers felt that they were being coerced into a state of blind conformity with a set of values and behaviours that they felt was alien to them. While managers were telling them that they were being empowered, their everyday experiences of work told them that control over the content of their jobs, the way they did they jobs and the way that they were required to behave in the workplace were all being systematically centralised into the hands of a small group of managers that would use pejorative terms to denigrate the non-compliant and even reorganise the whole organisation to ensure that the deadwood,

donkeys, luddites, bastards, moaning gits and laggards would no longer have a job. As new, independent-minded women moved into Stepford, they were quickly re-engineered into conformity and the men of Stepford continued to live comfortable lives supported by their mindless, docile, conformist wives. Do we want our young people to be educated by mindless, docile, conformist lecturers?

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