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**Contingent outcomes of management and leadership development
in public service organisations**

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1. Introduction

Recent investments in management and leadership development (MLD) are part of a longstanding search in the public services for the key to enable more effective organisational performance. Much is known about best practice in MLD, and the effective management and support of both the formal and informal learning process (Mole 2000, Van Velsor and McCauley 2004, Woodall and Winstanley 1998). There are also several well-developed frameworks for evaluating MLD outcomes at individual, group and organisational levels (Kirkpatrick 1958, Tamkin *et al.* 2002a, Tamkin *et al.* 2002b, Martineau 2004).

In practice, however, it is recognised that the evaluation of MLD outcomes is often incomplete and little is known about exactly 'what works in what situation' (Burgoyne *et al.* 2004, Mabey and Finch-Lees 2008, Winterton and Winterton 1999). Difficulties in evaluation are partly related to the complexity of measurement and observation in MLD (Guest and King 2005: 250-51, Mabey and Finch-Lees 2008: 68-69). They are also partly due to a tendency amongst human resource development (HRD) practitioners not to undertake in-depth evaluation for internal political reasons (Corby *et al.* 2005, Winterton and Winterton 1999: 31, Mole 2000: 45). But an underlying problem has been the tendency to ignore the realities of different levels of management and organisational contexts, in favour of concentrating on universalistic, prescriptive and individualised approaches to MLD as solutions to organisational problems (Bolden and Gosling 2004, Lawler 2008, Salaman 2004).

This paper addresses the question of whether, assuming best practice, MLD interventions and their outcomes are contingent on their specific management and organisational contexts. The focus taken here is on middle management. Drawing on Mintzberg's theory (1979) of configurational organisational types, the paper begins by setting out the different functions and skill requirements for middle management under the structural configurations that are most interesting for discussions of public service organisations (PSOs). Moreover, and in line with Pollitt (2005), Mintzberg's theory of horizontal decentralisation and structural transitions is developed as a means of conceptualising the restructuring of PSOs due to various public service reforms.

MLD investments are therefore interpreted as attempts to equip managers with the requisite skills and knowledge i) for the promotion of organisational continuity within the dominant organisational configuration, and ii) to prepare for, react to or contribute to organisational change, as the organisation is 'pulled' towards a new structural configuration. This theoretical position is summarised at the end of the paper's second section. The third section of the paper presents empirical evidence from three case studies to illustrate the contribution of MLD for middle management in three different types of PSOs under decentralisation pressures. The overall question of whether MLD outcomes can be considered as contingent is therefore addressed in the concluding section of the paper.

2. A specific context for MLD: middle management in public service organisations

Rather than self-interested and political obstacles to change, middle managers are increasingly viewed as occupying a pivotal group in organisations. Their mid-way position between senior and front-line management affords them the critical role of interpreting and framing strategic objectives for front-line staff (Floyd and Wooldridge 1997, Huy 2002, Balogun 2003, Mayer and Smith 2007). Moreover, the importance of line managers generally for bringing organisational policies to life has attracted much attention in recent human resource management (HRM) research (McGovern *et al.* 1997, Purcell *et al.* 2003, Purcell and Hutchinson 2007, Boxall and Purcell 2008). Finally, contemporary interest in leadership, specifically 'post-heroic' models of 'devolved' and 'distributed' leadership (Storey 2004a, MacBeath 2005), raises the question of whether middle managers should also be viewed as leaders, and whether they require special leadership skills.

Many definitions and typologies for the middle manager have been developed as part of the mainstream literature on management tasks, activities, jobs, behaviours and roles (Hales 1986: 94). However, as Grugulis observes, what might appear to be straightforward is actually "remarkably wide-ranging and resistant to definition" (2007:133). So much so that it is perhaps more fruitful to "focus on the differences between managers rather than seeking to emphasise what they share" (ibid:154). In this vein, it is helpful to develop an alternative conceptualisation of middle management as a contingent organisational function. This involves the deduction of a variety of middle management functions from a theory of organisational differences.

Theories of bureaucracy are a suitable starting point for a discussion of varying PSO contexts for middle management. As Hales remarks, PSOs can be seen as "the natural home of bureaucracy and the bureaucrat" (2002: 58). A particularly comprehensive theory of different types of bureaucracy is to be found in Mintzberg (1979), who distinguishes between five organisational types: the simple structure; the 'machine bureaucracy'; the 'professional bureaucracy'; the divisionalised form; and the adhocracy. All types except the simple structure have immediate application to contemporary PSOs. Within each type, Mintzberg highlights the basic differences between line- and staff-management and devotes attention to the 'middle line' and how it interrelates to other parts of the organisation. Furthermore, there is a sophisticated treatment of decentralisation, including a theorisation of change in coordination mechanisms. This is helpful as the concept of decentralisation encapsulates many features of intended public service reform at organisational level (Pollitt 2005).

Decentralisation is one of eight 'design parameters' of organisations, according to Mintzberg (1979). His is a contingency theory that argues that organisations have a strong, natural tendency to be designed in line with their internal and external environments in a search of efficiency-maximisation. According to Mintzberg, an organisation is chiefly

characterised by the way in which its main work tasks are divided and organised, namely its key coordination mechanism. As organisations grow and become more complex, the more they decentralise authority for decision-making away from senior management. An important distinction between vertical and horizontal decentralisation is made, with the former relating to the devolution of management responsibilities down the hierarchy to less senior staff, and the latter relating to the hiving off of responsibility for decisions over work to non-managers. Mintzberg divides organisations into five main parts: the strategic apex (senior management and directors), the middle line (middle managers with line responsibility); the operating core; the technostructure (technical analysts who standardise work systems); and the support staff (responsible for providing services for the operating core). Figure 1 illustrates the main dimensions of the four main types of organisation.

<i>Dimensions of Mintzberg's organisational structures</i>				
	Machine bureaucracy	Professional bureaucracy	Divisionalised form	Adhocracy
<i>Key coordination mechanism</i>	Standardisation of work processes	Standardisation of skills	Standardisation of outputs	Mutual adjustment
<i>Key part of organisation</i>	Technostructure	Operating core	Middle line	Support staff
<i>Type of decentralisation</i>	Limited horizontal decentralisation	Horizontal and vertical decent.	Limited vertical decentralisation	Selective decentralisation
<i>Function of the 'middle line'</i>	Elaborated and differentiated; conflict resolution; staff liaison; vertical communications	Controlled by professionals; much mutual adjustment	Formulation of local strategy; operations management	Extensive but blurred with staff function; project work

Figure 1. Dimensions of organisational configurations, adapted from Mintzberg (1979: 466-67)

Mintzberg's theory helpfully illustrates the diversity of the middle management role according to the varying structural configurations in organisations. His analysis of decentralisation is also pertinent to the study of public service reform. Amongst the vast literature on the shift from 'Old Public Administration' to 'New Public Management' in the 1980s and early 1990s (Dunleavy and Hood 1994), a recurring description of organisational change is the breaking up or disaggregating of large, multi-purpose bureaucracies to be replaced by decentralised sets of smaller, more autonomous units (Dunleavy *et al.* 2006,

Pollitt 2002). In effect, this pattern represents pressures to adopt new coordination mechanisms to cope with greater flexibility and competition. An example would be a machine bureaucracy, in which the organisation standardises its work processes such as through an assembly line, under pressure to adopt the divisionalised form, in which teams are freer to decide how their work is carried out, but have their final outputs standardised through performance monitoring by senior management.

The theme of decentralisation has continued amongst claims of the shift from new public management to modernisation, or the New Public Governance (Newman 2002, Osborne 2006). Amongst various measures, this second wave of public service reform is characterised by a more holistic concern with 'user needs', performance management and the use of information technology (Dunleavy *et al.* 2006, Bach and Kessler 2007). At organisational level, the most relevant aspect is the accentuated role of partnerships and networks of public, private and voluntary organisations in the provision of public services (Newman 2002, Osborne 2006). Here the role of mutual adjustment – involving collaboration and negotiation, rather than strict standardisation - may be highlighted as a coordination mechanism, particularly in the case of partnership work. A typical shift in organisational type would be from professional bureaucracy, in which work is standardised through the strict demarcation of responsibilities, towards adhocracy, in which work is defined through multi-disciplinary projects.

Mintzberg operationalises the concept of decentralisation at organisational level through the development of: i) a continuum of control over the decision making process (vertical decentralisation); and ii) a continuum of coordinating mechanisms (horizontal decentralisation) (Mintzberg 1979: 188, 198, Pollitt 2005: 385). The first helps to interpret the extent of the decision-making power that middle managers may have in an organisation. The second helps to interpret the type of decisions that middle managers tend to take in a particular organisation. Moreover, the continua help interpret how middle management functions in PSOs might be changing due to various reforms. Indeed, the two main waves of public service reform described above can be interpreted as various 'pulls' on PSOs to adopt new coordination mechanisms, and thus to change their structural configurations or develop hybrid forms (c.f. Mintzberg 1979: 469-73). Figure 2 illustrates a combination Mintzberg's theory of horizontal decentralisation with his theory of the configurations as basic pulls on the organisation.

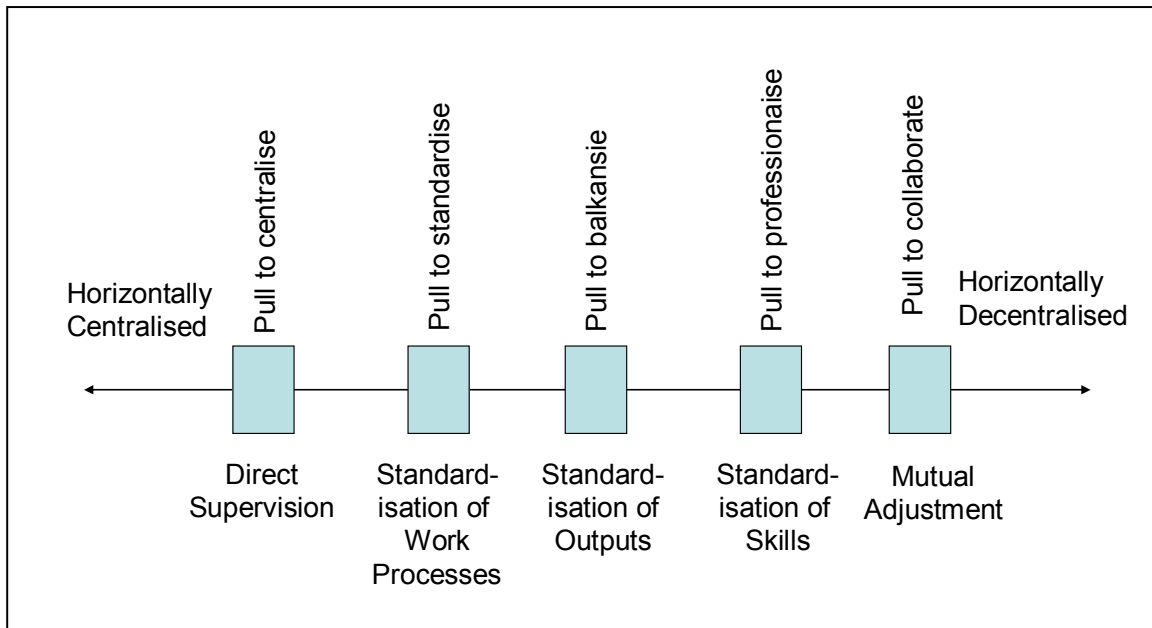


Figure 2. Continuum of horizontal decentralisation and pulls on the organisational structural configuration (adapted from Mintzberg 1979: 198, 302)

By probing the skill requirements under different organisational configurations, Mintzberg's model may be developed to gain a clearer understanding of the middle management function within both its dominant organisational configuration and the configuration towards which it is being pulled. The key distinction in terms of management functions thrown up by a consideration of different structural configurations concerns management through standardisation on the one hand, and mutual adjustment on the other. The conceptual distinction between management and leadership is helpful here (c.f. Kotter 1990, Zaleznik 1992), despite the warnings about the practical limitations and dangers of trying to separate the terms (Burgoyne *et al.* 2004: 13, Mintzberg 2004: 6).

For analytical purposes, management may be seen as primarily concerned with organisational continuity, and thus with ongoing decisions around the standardisation of work. Whether this concerns the standardisation of work processes, skills or outputs, the primary emphasis is on the coordination and control of work to implement business plans in the most efficient way. In contrast, leadership, or more appropriately 'leading' (Gold *et al.* 2003: 5), is primarily concerned with employee commitment rather than control, and influencing change of a more strategic kind. At middle levels in the hierarchy, the contribution to strategic change is largely one of influencing teams and colleagues across the organisation during the implementation of strategy, rather than the developing of new strategic plans and directions. The skills required for leading in the middle of the hierarchy may therefore be reinterpreted as the skills of influencing and collaboration for mutual adjustment.

Coming out of Mintzberg's four main structural configurations are four sets of middle management skills. There is some overlap between the skill-sets and the configurations, depending on whether one is responsible for the middle line, or for staff-management in the technostructure or support function. (For example, one might work as a middle manager of a support service within an adhocracy, such as the canteen, yet still practise Type A management, as the internal service requires machine bureaucratic coordination). Building on Mintzberg's theory (c.f. 1979: 280-81), the four main types of middle management roles and their key corresponding skills may be characterised as follows.

Type A. Machine middle line management

Key roles: conflict management, liaison and communications.

Key skills: people-management and communication.

Type B. Business division management

Key roles: strategic and operations management.

Key skills: technical and cognitive skills for standardisation-implementation and strategic management; people-management and communication.

Type C. Professional middle line management

Key roles: professional-managerial collaboration, mutual adjustment.

Key skills: professional knowledge and credibility; technical and cognitive skills for skills-standardisation; advanced soft skills for mutual adjustment.

Type D. Middle leadership

Key roles: project management, mutual adjustment.

Key skills: project management; advanced soft skills for mutual adjustment; middle-leadership skills (innovation and change-initiation).

Figure 3. Types of middle management

Type A middle managers are closest to the traditional notion of the 'linking pin' of the organisational hierarchy, acting out orders from senior management with limited discretion (c.f. Balogun 2003: 70). As the organisational 'machine' virtually runs itself according to pre-determined technical standards, the key skill for these managers is one of people-management and communication, to handle disturbances in routines and deal with human relations problems on the line.

Type B middle managers are best viewed as 'mini-general managers', running independent divisional operations (Mintzberg 1979: 384). In addition to technical and cognitive skills required for implementing standardisation of products and services, Type B middle managers require strategic management skills in order to manage the development of

their business divisions in the medium to long term and respond to changes in their particular market environments.

Type C middle managers are the middle-line managers in professional bureaucracies and require a complex set of skills. First, in order to have credibility in the professional community of the organisation, the professional line-manager has to be a qualified member of that profession, or as Mintzberg puts it, appropriately 'trained and indoctrinated' (1979: 95). Second, in order to manage the complexities of resource-allocation and other managerial tasks, the professional line-manager needs to possess the requisite technical and cognitive skills for standardisation-implementation. The third skill concerns mutual adjustment, the skills of which – negotiation, collaboration and influencing – can be re-interpreted as middle leader skills. Rather than act as an inspirational figure-head, Type C middle managers have to share responsibility for initiating and implementing change with professional colleagues, including the often slow and incremental processes of learning and development that accompany such change (Mintzberg 1979: 376).

Adhocracies require type D middle management. This requires mutual adjustment for the coordination of work across team and organisational boundaries, as well as the responsibility for coordinating work within multidisciplinary project teams (ibid: 434-35). Instead of developing and enacting of standardised and predictable work plans, by virtue of the work environment, these 'middle leaders' have to deal with greater uncertainty than in other types of middle management. They have to initiate change and innovation in collaboration with their colleagues across the organisation, and help coordinate new plans through project management and mutual adjustment, rather than centralised command-and-control. The skills of mutual adjustment therefore have to be supplemented with the other key skill of project management. This includes both the 'hard' skills of planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation, as well as the softer skills of communication and teamwork.

The question remains as to how the skills for the different types of middle management might be developed in individuals and groups. Day (2001) draws helpful distinctions between 'management development', 'leader development' and 'leadership development'. He argues that management development has "mainly a training orientation", characterising it as "the application of proven solutions to known problems" (582), whereas leader development focuses on developing the individual "to think and act in new ways" (584), and leadership development is a more collective process toward "building capacity in anticipation of unforeseen challenges" (582). Therefore, whilst management development tends to follow prescribed learning programmes, leader development tends to employ individualised methods with less defined learning outcomes, such as 360-degree feedback, coaching and personal development plans. Leadership development, on the other hand,

tends to involve more collective learning activities such as action learning and special assignments (584) (see also Van Velsor and McCauley 2004).

The broad organisational aims that drive each of the different types of MLD require some explanation. Firstly, in the case of management development, there is a strong business motivation for organisations invest in standard, usually competency-based programmes in order to maintain service for customers and implement strategic and business plans. In short, investment in standardised management development provision can help ensure organisational continuity. Secondly, in addition to investing in an adequate stock and flow of competent managers, HR functions increasingly recognise the importance of positive relationships between employees and their line managers in order to maintain or increase employee motivation and discretionary effort (Purcell et al. 2003: 7, Boxall and Purcell 2008: 219). Thus the decision to invest in leader development interventions, sometimes as the self-development or self-management element of standard management development programmes. Leader development aims to enable individual managers to learn about themselves, how they can improve their relationships with others and lead or influence their teams more effectively. Thirdly, for a more specific drive for innovation and organisational change, HR functions tend to turn to leadership development activities that encourage more participative involvement in strategic development and draw on managers' personal resources to make more active contributions to strategic change.

If MLD is to contribute to strategic HRM goals as intended, then it has to be assumed that the learning transfer process itself, and the management of it, is effective. Therefore, it must assumed that best practice principles of 'assessment, challenge and support' are adhered to (Van Velsor and McCauley 2004). This means that the individual learners' experiences meet their and the HR function's expectations of MLD interventions and that individuals' learning is successfully transferred into improved practice and performance in the workplace. This is, however, a large assumption to make, as in practice many MLD interventions are in fact misconceived, ill-matched to both individual and business needs, poorly implemented and ineffectively followed-up (c.f. Conger and Toegel 2003, Hansen *et al.* 1999). Assuming, however, that MLD can successfully be effectively managed, *it may be hypothesised that MLD interventions and their outcomes are essentially products of their organisational contexts, and are both driven by and drivers of organisational continuity and change.*

Turning to the question of organisational transitions due to decentralisation, the most interesting structural pulls in a discussion of PSOs are those on the two classic public sector types: the machine bureaucracy (encompassing such services as the post office, transport, some civil and local government services); and the professional bureaucracy (such as in health, education, social work). Following rightward the continuum of increasing horizontal

decentralisation (Figure 2), the machine bureaucracy, originally using standardisation by work processes, can shift towards either: i) the divisionalised form, due to a pull to divisionalise or 'balkanise' (called here 'Type W' decentralisation); ii) the professional bureaucracy, due increased complexity in work tasks and a pull to professionalise (Type X decentralisation); or even iii) the adhocracy, due to technological advances and a pull to collaborate (Type Y decentralisation). Along the same continuum, the professional bureaucracy can only be pulled towards the adhocracy (Type Z decentralisation), due to increased dynamism and experimentation in its work tasks (Mintzberg 1979: 470-71).

Various hybrids may result in the event of incomplete transitions and complete transitions in organisational types are not easily achieved. Indeed, Mintzberg makes the distinction between functional and dysfunctional hybrids. The latter are especially interesting for discussions of public services, as they arise from "contradictory contingency factors", such as political intervention, over which organisations have no choice (1979: 474). Mintzberg notes that "structural transitions often lag the new conditions that evoke them", mainly due to resistance to change, and that in some cases are never fully completed, "wavering between two structures" in "an intermediate hybrid state" and "a kind of organizational schizophrenia" (1979: 479).

Notwithstanding the complexities of structural hybrids, a model of MLD intervention for the main four types of middle managers can now be developed to illustrate MLD's contribution to organisational continuity and change. Figure 4 sets out how the four types of middle management A-D can be expected to require different management development interventions (MD1, MD2, MD3 and MD4) for the purposes of organisational continuity. In the specific case of professional middle line management (Type C) there is an additional need for leader development (LD), due to the importance of advanced soft skills for mutual adjustment. Middle managers in adhocracies (Type D) also require leader development (LD) for the same reason, as well as leadership development (LSD) in order to innovate and manage continual flux in product markets. In addition to MLD interventions for continuity, Figure 4 models those combinations of MLD interventions that are related to the four different types of decentralisation W-Z. The shaded areas illustrate how, in order to react to, prepare for and contribute to processes of organisational change, machine and professional middle line management require additional MLD interventions associated with another form of coordination further along the continuum of horizontal decentralisation.

It may seem overly simplistic and reductive to map different types and subtypes of MLD intervention against different types of middle management in such a straightforward way. In reality, there is likely to be much commonality across the different types of management development and across those interventions, particularly to develop basic and advanced soft skills. Similarly, differences between individual managers' learning needs may

lead to a diversity of MLD interventions amongst managers that share similar mid-hierarchy positions in the same organisation. The point, however, has been to illustrate how different strategic investments in MLD interventions for middle managers in PSOs are likely to be driven by varying organisational contexts, including the extent to which the organisation is under pressure to decentralise. If best practice principles are applied in the management of MLD, it is also possible to model hypothetical patterns of MLD outcomes for individuals, groups and organisations, dependent on their choice of MLD intervention.

MLD interventions for middle management in PSOs	MLD interventions				
	for continuity	for decentralisation			
		W	X	Y	Z
Type A. Machine middle line management <i>Key skills:</i> relevant business and technical knowledge; cognitive and basic soft skills for people-management and communication (MD1).	MD1	MD1	MD1	MD1	
Type B. Business division management <i>Key skills:</i> cognitive and basic soft skills for people-management and communication (MD1); technical and cognitive skills for output-standardisation and strategic management (MD2)	MD1	(MD1)			
	MD2	MD2			
Type B. Professional middle line management <i>Key skills:</i> professional knowledge and credibility; technical and cognitive skills for skills-standardisation (MD3); advanced soft skills for mutual adjustment (LD).	MD3		MD3		MD3
	LD		LD		LD
Type D. Middle leadership <i>Key skills:</i> project management (MD4); advanced soft skills for mutual adjustment (LD); middle-leadership skills (LSD).	MD4			MD4	MD4
	LD			LD	(LD)
	LSD			LSD	LSD

MD = management development; LD = leader development; LSD = leadership development

Figure 4. MLD interventions for middle management under organisational continuity and decentralisation

In accepting that organisations make rational, efficiency-seeking MLD choices, one might nevertheless ask why it is such a common complaint in organisations that MLD activities lack relevance to managerial reality, are a wasted investment and produce cynicism amongst the workforce rather than their intended business outcomes (c.f. Mabey and Finch-

Lees 2008: 4). Following the logic above, the underlying explanation for this has to be that, for MLD interventions to contribute successful business performance, to paraphrase Boxall & Purcell (2008: 5), individual manager-learners must not only have the ability and motivation, they must also have the *opportunity* to apply their learning. It is the organisational context that is the source of such opportunity. Successful learning transfer partly depends on the individual learners' motivation, and partly on the HRD function to manage the learning transfer process effectively. But however motivated the individual learner, and however sophisticated and effective the HRD function, it is the way in which the work of the organisation is coordinated and structured, that will ultimately determine and shape the ways in which learning is applied.

Such claims, however, require empirical scrutiny. The next section presents the results of a comparative study of three different cases of MLD for middle management in PSOs under different types of decentralisation.

3. Comparative case studies

Method

The empirical task is to investigate the realities of change, its underlying reasons and its effects at the level of both the organisation and the individual middle manager in PSOs. The case study research strategy is therefore best suited to addressing the 'why' and 'how' questions (Yin 1994) raised here and addressed through the conceptual lens of Mintzberg, rather than the 'what' or 'how much' questions of organisational and individual change.

Taking the organisation as the unit of analysis allows the researcher to investigate the interrelationships between middle management functions, their associated skills and MLD interventions in a number of different organisational contexts. A comparative case study design is therefore appropriate, seeking to "raise the level of precision in the causal priority attributable to the mechanism or the context" (Ackroyd 2009: 539). It was necessary to select organisations that were known for 'best practice' in MLD in their particular parts of the public services. This helped to ensure that the observed effectiveness or ineffectiveness of MLD interventions were less likely to be explained by ineffective HRD functions or poor internal management of learning within individual organisations. The selection of cases is therefore mainly determined by variation on the independent variable, that of organisational configuration, rather by variation on the dependent variable, the effects of MLD (c.f. Collier *et al.* 2004: 98).

The small number of cases (three) selected here, however, presents the potential problem that a number of other important variables, unrelated to either MLD intervention or

organisational type, are likely to have an influence on the outcomes of MLD for individuals, groups or the organisation. For example, informal organisation and professional communities of practice have been shown to have a significant influence over what middle managers learn and how they react to formal HR interventions (Brown and Duguid 1991, Truss 2001). Such influences might therefore produce effects that lie outside of the key theoretical propositions investigated and the main explanations offered for the findings. The principal way of overcoming this problem is by triangulation of multiple sources of evidence within each case (Yin 1994).

In order to study variation in MLD interventions and outcomes for middle management across the decentralisation types W-Z above, it was necessary to select cases from examples of machine bureaucracies and professional bureaucracies under different types of decentralisation pressures. For cases associated with Type W decentralisation, it was necessary to look to PSOs that possessed the characteristics of the machine bureaucracy but which were under pressure to shift towards divisionalised forms. This is common in cases of privatisation, such as in the utilities, distribution and transport sectors (c.f. Dunleavy *et al.* 2006). For cases associated with Type X decentralisation, it was necessary to look to machine bureaucracy-type PSOs that were under pressure to professionalise. Such trends are observable amongst groups of workers that seek or are under pressure to assume professional status and recognition in society, such as nurses, unqualified social care workers, police officers and firefighters (c.f. Ferlie and Geraghty 2005: 425, 426). Cases associated with Type Y decentralisation are extremely rare and are not considered in this paper. For cases associated with Type Z decentralisation, one had to look to professional bureaucracies under pressure to shift towards a more adhocratic mechanism of coordination. The most typical examples include PSOs within medicine, health, social care and education, in which staff are encouraged to work with partners on joint projects outside their traditional professional remits.

The final set of considerations relevant to case selection was the attempt to keep potentially confounding factors constant. In the same way that case study organisations were all required to exhibit best practice in MLD, the organisations also had to be: i) of a similar size (the three cases were all large organisations of between 4000 and 7000 employees); ii) of similar geographical location (all cases were from the South East of England); and iii) should have experienced a similar scale of change and restructuring (i.e. corporate transformation, rather than fine-tuning, incremental adjustment or modular transformation (Dunphy and Stace 1992, cited in Farnham *et al.* 2005: 41)).

In line with the triangulation strategy, data was collected from a range of organisational documentation, twenty-five semi-structured interviews with senior and HRD managers and fifty critical incident interviews (Flanagan 1954, Chell 1998) with middle

managers under development. The total seventy-five interviewees were roughly distributed across the three organisations (case 1: 18; case 2:30; case 3: 27), and were selected using a mixture of convenience and snowball sampling (Bryman and Bell 2003: 356-57).

Case 1 (Type W): NewToc

Type W decentralisation – from machine bureaucracy towards divisionalised form - was well illustrated by 'NewToc'. This was a train operating company which was formerly the passenger service within a regional rail network and thus part of the bigger nationwide British Rail machine bureaucracy. Originally, the coordination mechanism used was to standardise work processes through centralised control that would regulate services by train timetables and passenger safety routines (c.f. Mintzberg 1979: 331-32). After privatisation of the rail network in 1996, however, NewToc was sold as a subsidised, private franchise on a fixed term basis in a market-tendering process. The winner of the new franchise would be responsible for running (but not owning) the stations and trains on the regional network of lines on a customer-satisfying and profit-making basis.

Performance indicators for customer-satisfaction and other operations were therefore decentralised to the private company but monitored at national level by the government-controlled regulator. After privatisation, NewToc itself decentralised responsibility for performance for trains, stations, depots and other business units across the company, representing new responsibilities, particularly for middle management. As part of the wide-scale and ongoing process of restructuring, the company experienced severe employment relations problems from 1997-2003, but was applauded in the industry for overcoming these, apparently due to HRM/MLD interventions from 2003-2007.

The typical middle manager in a train operating company is a station or depot manager, responsible for an operational business unit, a team of front-line managers, a group of operational staff and a small number of administrative staff. Alongside a continually evolving competency framework, there were two key MLD interventions that affected middle managers between 2005 and 2006: firstly, a suite of traditional training courses in people-management, comprising of several day-courses for all circa five hundred managers in the company; and secondly, a 'talent-management' programme, that employed leader development methods such as psychometric testing, 360-degree feedback and coaching for fifty 'high potential' (mainly middle) managers over a twelve-month period.

It was found that the first intervention, by training managers in a conventional classroom setting to enforce a coherent and focused set of people-management policies, contributed significantly to improved HR outcomes of attendance and employee satisfaction and customer service in the medium-term. The training in attendance- and discipline-management was the most significant aspect, particularly for the less experienced middle

managers. Due to the history of adversarial employment relations in the company, this training was viewed by almost interviewees as a 'survival tool-kit'. To an extent, the people-management training, even in the 'harder' aspects of people management such as attendance-management and discipline, was also viewed as enabling for the 'softer' practices of individualised communication with staff.

The intention of senior management was that a greater individualisation of the employment relationship, promoted through training, should enable 'cultural change' from a traditional rail operator to a customer-focussed retail service (c.f. Strangleman 2004). It cannot be argued, however, that the people management training contributed to fundamental organisational change. Rather it contributed to increased organisational efficiency and continuity as a machine bureaucracy, albeit that of a 'cleaned up' bureaucracy (Heckscher 1994).

The second MLD intervention, the talent management programme, had multiple objectives. This included the retention and promotion of high-performing middle managers, as well as the improvement of overall business performance and acceleration of cultural change. The intervention was found to be very limited in its impact both on individuals and on the business. On re-franchising the company in 2007, a year after the intervention, fourteen of the fifty participants (28%) actually left the organisation as compared to 16.3% of middle managers. As with the people-management training, there was some evidence, however, that the talent management intervention succeeded in making some middle managers more reflective about their interactions with individual team members. Arguably this resulted in some contribution towards improved HR outcomes and appeared in some cases to have contributed to improving organisational performance through more effective goal-setting with frontline managers. This was most apparent in the retail and support functions, in which real-time and detailed data were available for objective discussions around improving business performance. In the drivers' function, by contrast, managers were restricted to more subjective discussions about employee behaviour and attitudes, as the relevant performance data (e.g. on train reliability) could not be meaningfully disaggregated and attributed to individual driver teams.

The NewToc case illustrates the potential of MLD for promoting organisational efficiency and continuity, but also the constraint on its contribution to organisational change in machine bureaucracies. The company's choices of MLD interventions were rational but only partially effective. In the wake of radical decentralisation reforms, targeted and well-designed training in the implementation of new, robust and transparent HR policies appeared to be instrumental in 'cleaning up' the instruments of standardisation so that the organisation could restore and continue operational efficiency. The dominance of the key coordination mechanism, however - the standardisation of routines for the efficient and safe running of

trains –, ensured that attempts to promote organisational change through leader development were limited to the customer-facing and support functions of the organisation.

Case 2 (Type X): Fire Brigade

Type X decentralisation – from machine towards professional bureaucracy - was well illustrated by the fire brigade case. Fire departments have traditionally been viewed as classic machine bureaucracies, in fact variants described by Mintzberg as ‘safety’ or a ‘contingency’ bureaucracies (Mintzberg 1979: 332-333). This means that coordination is achieved in such organisations through the formalisation and extensive rehearsal of work routines to minimise risks to safety, or to respond to situations of an emergency but predictable nature.

However, in the mid 1990s there were incidences of fatal errors of coordination at middle management level in the UK fire service. These combined with perceived increases in the unpredictability of fire and other emergency incidents and in the sophistication of technology and processes involved in incident-response, the operational responsibility for which lay mainly with fire station managers (middle management).

The changed environment for the fire service, and industrial disputes about firefighters’ pay and conditions in 2002-3, resulted in nationwide modernisation reforms and restructurings of brigades, including new terms and conditions for firefighters in 2004. The underlying aim of the reforms was to transform the fire service from a reactive emergency-response service into a preventative ‘community fire safety’ service. A key component was a move away from traditional, technical and exam-based recruitment and promotion practices towards the development of competency-based management.

The case study fire brigade was at the forefront of changing the traditional rank structure to a role structure, based on sets of professional competences for firefighters and fire service managers. In this sense, it led the attempt to shift coordination away from standardised work processes towards standardisation through skills that was then adopted nationwide, as the ‘Integrated Personal Development System’.

The case study focuses on the contribution of the station manager development programme and other management development courses offered to middle managers from the brigade’s internal training function in the period 2002-05. The station manager development programme consisted of four main elements: i) a selection and assessment centre; ii) a series of taught development modules; iii) completion of a development portfolio of workplace evidence; and iv) periodic workplace assessment, usually including a six-month placement in another area of the organisation. Successful and sequential completion of all stages of the process entitled a candidate to be deemed ‘competent’ and available for selection for promotion. The other miscellaneous courses, such as on ‘values-centred

leadership', were available to both uniformed and non-uniformed managers and took the form of day-courses offered through the brigade's own training centre, using trainers who were both internally and externally sourced. The entire MLD provision, therefore, was firmly in the management development, rather than the leader or leadership development mode.

Completion of the station commander development programme was the lengthiest MLD intervention for middle managers, typically lasting two-three years, but was compulsory for promotion. The twenty-three modules specific to the station manager role were predominantly concerned with operations-management and people-management, with a smaller proportion of modules dedicated to generic leadership and miscellaneous managerial content. It was found, however, that none of the above MLD interventions impacted significantly on individuals, with the exception the technical and operational content of the station commander development programme. In particular, the small amount of formal development for non-uniformed managers from the support side of the organisation was almost completely ineffective.

The most significant modules of the station commander development programme were those concerned with the station manager's role in fire-ground incidents. In line with the intended cultural shift away from militaristic command-and-control to a more empowering model of management, rather than take direct charge over a fire incident, the station manager was taught to play a supportive and developmental role to the senior firefighter, typically the 'watch manager', who would act as incident commander.

Despite the investment in formal training, informal experiences were found to be much more significant in terms of learning. In particular, middle managers' approaches to people-management and leadership were invariably modelled on their previous experience and interaction with former station managers. Formal training in the areas of employee motivation, assessment and development, and in the conventional line-management responsibilities of planning work, running meetings and conducting performance appraisals were considered interesting by some, but generally not relevant to the realities of the job. Other managerial tasks such as planning, quality assurance information management, budgeting were evidenced through the development portfolios, but were treated largely as an exercise in compliance rather than a learning experience.

The fire brigade case illustrates the partial success but also the limitations of attempting to drive transformational organisational change in machine bureaucracies through MLD. It appears that the shifting of the coordination mechanism used in fire incidents away from command-and-control to a more empowering and developmental model was successfully reinforced through the training of operational middle managers. In this sense, transition from machine bureaucratic coordination to a more professional approach was

partially achieved, as firefighters were encouraged and enabled to make independent judgements and to develop within a detailed framework of vocational competences.

The development of skills of mutual adjustment amongst middle managers, however, was neither seriously addressed nor enabled by operational reality. Formal attempts to train the managers in leadership, for example, were undermined by the strength of the informal organisation in fire stations. The use of leader development methods, combined with the organisation-wide promotion of community fire safety, might have helped integrate the management of the organisation's support functions with that of its operating core, and helped complete the organisational transition from machine to professional bureaucracy. Similarly, the opportunities for middle managers to apply their learning of other standard managerial techniques, such as budgeting and information management, were not sufficiently available, as these were more suited to decentralised and divisionalised structures. Overall, the brigade remained highly centralised and retained strong characteristics of machine-bureaucracy, which partly influenced the nature of its MLD offer and strongly influenced the MLD outcomes.

Case 3 (Type Z): Adult Social Services Department

Type Z decentralisation – from professional bureaucracy towards adhocracy - was well illustrated by the adult social services department case. Social work for children and adults in the UK had traditionally been delivered by a classic professional bureaucracy. From 1993, social services were decentralised to local authorities, but continued to be regulated by strict professional standards around training, recruitment and promotion of social workers, as well as codes of practice for making decisions about care provision and intervention (c.f. Mintzberg 1979: 349-51).

From 1998, however, there was a push towards greater horizontal decentralisation, in that the Labour Government encouraged and incentivised local authorities both to devolve care provision to voluntary and private sector organisations and to work together with a wider range of public agency partners to stimulate and innovate new ways of providing care. This had particular implications for middle management, where the responsibility lay for assessing the needs for care provision in a particular district and commissioning it from a range of providers.

The social services department in question was at the forefront of decentralising responsibility for its adult care provision and investing in MLD as an important element of its strategy. By 2005, adult social services had been separated from social care provision for children, and provided virtually no care directly, preferring to commission care out of its budget entirely from private and voluntary sector providers. After pronouncing the department as 'poor' in 1998, at a time of severe problems of employee retention and

turnover, particularly amongst social workers, in the mid-late 2000s Government inspections awarded maximum ratings of excellence, making particular references to excellence in leadership, innovations in care provision and investments in people-management and HRM as importance contributory factors.

During the period 2005-07, middle managers in the adult social service department participated in three MLD interventions that spanned the range of management development, leader development and leadership development. The interventions consisted of: i) the local council's year-long diploma in management (an internally-taught and -assessed but externally-accredited programme); ii) a three-day leader development workshop 'From Good to Great' (comprised of a series of introspective individual and group activities facilitated by external trainers); and iii) a year-long series of leadership development workshops and action learning sets 'Inspirational Leadership' (facilitated by an external consultant).

The Diploma in Management was found to be effective in ensuring that middle managers upheld professional standards in their teams and that they applied the organisation's HR policies effectively. In addition, for those managers with the opportunity to work beyond their normal departmental boundaries, the intervention was found to promote the implementation of strategic objectives, notably working with partners to redesign services. For example, one manager used the final project of the diploma as an opportunity to set up a wood recycling social enterprise with a voluntary sector organisation that worked with long-term unemployed people with mental health disabilities. In this sense, the diploma in management both contributed to organisational continuity and supported the strategic transition towards a more adhocratic type of coordination.

'From Good to Great', in contrast, made little tangible contribution. Whilst the intervention may have enhanced individuals' skills of mutual adjustment by enabling them to be more reflective about their interactions and behaviour towards others, participants were generally unable to identify how this learning had been applied. There was some evidence that the more experienced and senior middle managers used their enhanced self-awareness to develop their team's services through more effective interaction and target-setting with their frontline managers. Overall, however, the intervention was ineffective in impacting on group or organisational outcomes due to its highly individualised nature and lack of anchoring in a specific professional context.

'Inspirational Leadership' was a collective learning experience and firmly anchored in the complexities of implementing change in social care management. Despite mixed reactions at individual level, it was found that the actual outcomes of the intervention were significant at group and organisational level. The action learning sets that arose out of the workshops initiated specific change-projects at middle management level, such as the development of a new process for training district managers in the commissioning of

services. They also led to the creation of a new communication mechanism, the county district managers group, in which participants shared practical solutions to strategic implementation problems, such as the introduction of electronic payments for services. In this sense, the intervention made a small but significant contribution to organisational change, as it enabled middle managers both to learn and apply the skills of middle leadership, going beyond typical professional norms into adhocratic ways of working.

The adult social services case illustrates the specific contributions that MLD for middle management might make to organisational continuity and change in decentralising professional bureaucracies. Within a context of established professional and managerial standards, it appears that investments in robust management development programmes can make a significant contribution to organisation efficiency. It also seems that leader development interventions might help develop skills for mutual adjustment in individuals, but will have only a piecemeal impact if they are conceived and delivered in a way that is divorced from professional realities. Leadership development interventions appear to have significant value in enabling transitions towards adhocracy, although much would seem to depend on a supportive senior leadership that allows the space for conversations between peers to develop and for projects to be initiated.

Conclusion: are MLD interventions and outcomes contingent?

The expected differences between MLD interventions for middle management in PSOs under various types of decentralisation were modelled in the second section of the paper using Mintzberg's theory of structural configurations. Also in the theoretical section, it was propounded that, assuming best practice: management development would contribute towards ensuring that different types of standardisation were effectively implemented; leader development would contribute towards the development of skills for mutual adjustment; and leadership development would contribute towards the initiation of innovations and changes to the business. In short, it was hypothesised that MLD interventions and outcomes in PSOs were contingent on the management function and the type of organisational change.

The case of NewToc, illustrating decentralisation from machine bureaucracy towards the divisionalised form (Type W), largely supported the overall hypothesis. It did this by demonstrating the success of a tailored management development intervention in contributing to organisational efficiency and continuity, and the failure of a leader development intervention to contribute to organisational change. The organisation equipped its middle managers effectively for a Type A management function, by investing in people-management training, and allowing the relevant business and technical knowledge to be acquired in more piecemeal fashion (MD1). However, to support organisational change

towards more decentralisation and divisionalisation, rather than invest in equipping their middle managers for Type B function, through management development for a more strategic and business performance-orientated type of management (MD2), the company chose to invest in a largely ineffective leader development-type intervention (LD). The chosen type of investment may have served alternative HRM goals, such as reward and retention, rather than the business needs of organisational change (c.f. Boxall and Purcell 2008: 20). Moreover, it is possible that the work of the machine bureaucracy was so strongly resistant to diversification and decentralisation that the situation did not warrant investment in the corresponding type of MLD (MD2). Either way, the company's investment in leader development, as hypothesised, was ill-matched and effectively failed to support the intended corporate transformation to a decentralised, divisionalised form.

The case of the fire brigade, illustrating decentralisation from machine bureaucracy towards the professional bureaucracy (Type X), was more complex in terms of the gap between the expected and actual outcomes of MLD. A comprehensive competency framework and accompanying investment in development at all levels in the fire service ensured that middle managers (Type A) were equipped with the relevant technical knowledge, including an effort to train them in people-management and communication skills (MD1). This was, however, only partially successful in that the people-management and communication aspects of the middle management role were effectively learnt through informal, rather than formal means. To some extent this failed aspect of formal training was mitigated by the successful adaptation of the development programme to include aspects of a more professionalised approach to operational management at fire incidents (MD3). A complete transition to a professional bureaucracy did not, however, manifest itself, thus denying the middle management function of the opportunity to practice mutual adjustment, and perhaps explaining the lack of significant investment in leader development (LD) to promote this.

The case of the adult social services department, illustrating decentralisation from professional bureaucracy towards adhocracy (Type Z), provided reasonably strong evidence in support of the general hypothesis. The qualification-based management development programme ensured that middle managers were equipped for Type C management, by investing in the acquisition of a wide and relevant range of technical, professional and managerial knowledge and skills (MD3). The programme included some attention to the skills for mutual adjustment (LD), but the additional investment in this area failed to make a significant impact due to its lack of embeddedness in professional work. Greater investment, however, was made in developing middle leadership (LSD) amongst district managers, which proved effective in supporting the strategic organisational change towards adhocracy. Yet there appeared to be little systematic attempt to invest in developing project management

skills (MD4), which was the other key aspect of middle management in adhocracies (Type D).

The three cases together reveal a rich pattern that is reasonably consistent with the general hypothesis. The cases demonstrate that the key coordination mechanism in PSOs, that of various forms of standardisation, or that of mutual adjustment, appears to have a decisive influence over the choice and effectiveness of MLD interventions. The cases also illustrate the problems of organisational change in terms of transition from one coordination mechanism and its accompanying structural configuration to another (c.f. Mintzberg 1979: 474). It seems that MLD investments that are ill-matched to operational realities, in that they do not support the direction of intended organisational transition, are likely to be ineffective in impacting on group or organisational outcomes. Similarly, attempts to employ MLD to support structural transitions are easily undermined by an incomplete transition and the strong gravitational pulls that are exerted by the original and dominant organisational type.

In the case of transitions from professional bureaucracy to adhocracy, however, it appears that judicious investments in leadership development may provide powerful catalysts for organisational change. This supports the view that leadership development requires specific conditions to be effective, rather than serve as a panacea for organisational problems in the public services (c.f. Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe 2004, Storey 2004b: 4-5, Grugulis 2007: 145, Parker 2004: 2-3, cited in Lawler 2008: 22-23). Further studies that examine specific contingencies at organisational level need to be undertaken to provide a richer insight into the actual complexities of public service reform and the contribution and limitation of MLD interventions to organisational continuity and change.

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