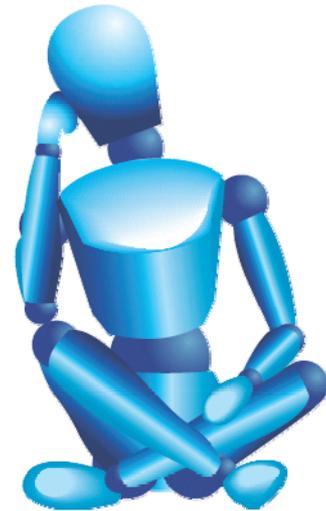


CEL Research Programme 2006-07



Research Report

Leadership, Diversity and Decision Making

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Leadership for the Learning and Skills Sector



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We hope this Paper provides a further opportunity to reflect on how organizational policy and practice can continue to build diversity and equality.

The Research Team

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Introduction

This working paper reports on leadership decision making in the UK Further Education (FE) sector drawing on the *Integrating Diversity in Leadership* project funded by the Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL). The project was undertaken by a team from the University of Southampton and Oxford Brookes University. The Full Report is available at:

<http://www.lums.lancs.ac.uk/leadership/cel/>

The focus on leadership decision making arises from a conviction that increasing staff and student diversity in the sector brings unprecedented challenges and implications for leading and managing learning, learners and the learning community (Lumby with Coleman, 2007). Among the wide ranging challenges is that of enabling groups and teams to deliver 'quality decisions' (Hoffberg and Korver, 2006:2). The paper investigates the extent to which the increasing diversity in colleges impacts on the decision making capacity of leadership teams and groups within the sector. Our focus on this aspect of decision making is based on three key assumptions:

- Decision making is integral to the multiple roles that leaders play in their organisations. We draw from Elsass and Graves (1997) who have argued that leadership is crucially about making decisions;
- Staff in organisations generally prefer to be involved in decisions and decision making which have a direct or indirect bearing on their corporate and personal lives;
- Leaders strive to make competent decisions all the time and will seek to suppress those factors which they perceive as compromising the potential for generating quality decisions, however defined.

The main report of the project sets out the context in which this work has been undertaken (Lumby et al, 2007). It outlines the emphasis placed on diversity and equality issues by the DfES (2006) and the considerable work undertaken to date within and for the sector (CfBSFE, 2002; Hunter, nd.; Turner, nd.), reflecting the sector's historic commitment to inclusion (DfES, 2005). The main report states the premises of the research within which this paper has been developed:

- Equality and diversity are crucial and powerful elements in raising the quality of leadership of the sector and thereby its performance;

- Diversity is understood to encompass the very many characteristics which differentiate leaders;
- Leadership is assumed to be relevant to many staff and not just those with formally designated leadership roles;
- Diverse leadership has the potential to perform more effectively but only if there is integration;
- Understanding the nature of integration and discovering the mechanism(s) by which integration can be achieved is a critical task for research in the sector.

(Lumby et al., 2007: 2)

This working paper has been developed in this broad context and is based on the assumptions above.

Aims of this paper:

Given the increasing diversity of staff and students in colleges in the FE sector and the centrality of decision making to leadership roles, this paper has the following key aims:

- To explore the key concepts of diversity, leadership and decision making and unpack the links between them;
- To critically examine currently available evidence on the significance of diversity to leadership decision making;
- To utilise models of organisational decision making as tools for interrogating the project data in order to discover the extent to which diversity issues are impacting on the decision making capacity of college leadership;
- To draw from the available data lessons that could inform the development of decision making skills in diverse leadership environments.

We begin with a broad theoretical review of the central concepts of diversity, leadership and decision making.

Conceptual Frameworks

Diversity

Diversity – Narrow and Broad

The concept of diversity is a complex socio-political construct which has multiple meanings in a range of organisational contexts. As a political idea, diversity is often used within organisations to selectively identify those aspects of difference among individuals or groups which the majority feels are in its interests to foreground (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000). However, such selection may suppress some forms of difference while elevating others and may therefore be a source of organisational tension or stress. For example, an organisation which places issues of gender equality at the top of the diversity agenda may run the risk of ignoring ethnic and other forms of diversity, occasioning organisational discord in the long run and clouding rather than illuminating attempts to become more transparent and responsive to issues of diversity (Ball, 2001). The social dimensions of diversity are encapsulated in its conceptualisation as the new driver for organisational development (Simkins, 2000) and in its instrumental value to the emerging needs of contemporary workplaces (Patrickson & Hartmann, 2001) through which others have argued a business case for diversity to be developed in educational environments (Lumby, 2006).

Milliken & Martins (1996) have provided the most comprehensive review of the impact of diversity on organisational groups, noting that there are 'narrow and broad perspectives of diversity'. The narrow perspectives tend to provide a monolithic view of diversity where specific forms of human heterogeneity are emphasised. Such views of diversity have led to a plethora of legislative initiatives focusing primarily on race, sex and disability discrimination. In education, as in other sectors, equal opportunities legislation for example, has had some impact on the employment, retention and development of staff and has become a significant catch phrase for organisations intent on publicly demonstrating a commitment to working within the framework of diversity. This approach to diversity, it can be argued, reifies, rather than integrates the variety of aspects around human differences.

Broad perspectives of diversity on the other hand seek to bring together a wide range of aspects which denote human heterogeneity, incorporating them into frameworks through which the whole gamut of organisational activity, including management and leadership, are considered and implemented. This is no mean task for a variety of reasons, a key one being the challenge of the

very variety of difference which organisations must consider. The most commonly cited dimensions of diversity included in broad definitions of the concept include: age, disability, religion, education, lifestyle, beliefs, physical appearance, social class and economic status (Norton & Fox, 1997). In addition, Lumby (2006:152) has suggested that educational leaders also see diversity in terms of 'a range of attributes, skills and experience involving characteristics such as function, length of service and style of leadership'. The challenge for leaders who see diversity from this broad perspective is that of developing an integrated approach in their roles and management which not only acknowledges and celebrates human heterogeneity, but embeds difference positively as an overarching philosophy into the working of groups and teams charged with the responsibility for making organisational decisions.

Diversity – Observable and Non-Observable

An additional way to unravel the concept of diversity has been to categorise human heterogeneity as either observable (Simons & Pelled, 1999) or non observable (Milliken & Martins, 1996). Race, ethnicity, gender and disability are often understood to be visible categories of diversity while experience, expertise and educational background are less observable categories. Drawing from a biological metaphor, such categorisation could be equated with the distinction between continuous and discontinuous variables. Observable categories of diversity could be assumed to represent the discontinuous dimension, where a specific individual can either be disabled or not disabled; Black African or White English, male or female, but not both, and is assumed not to exist on a continuum between the variables. On the other hand, the non observable dimensions of diversity could be equated with the notion of continuous variables, for which the human characteristic in question exists not in neat categories but on a continuum, for example more or less experienced in a leadership role. However, because diversity is not just about how people appear, but also how they feel about how they appear, and how others feel about them, even the observable features could exist in a wide ranging continuum which may never be stable over time. Litvin (1997) has challenged categorising human differences into stable types, arguing that such classification has its roots in classical scientific taxonomies which cannot be applied easily and straightforwardly to real people. Herein is the problem for those seeking to work with/for diversity; that of uncertainties associated with the infinitely variable forms of human heterogeneity and the right of each human to control their identity, rather than being assigned to a group by others (Bauman, 2004). Some North Africans for example, tend to be unhappy with ethnicity labels that link them with being African or indeed with being Black African and so may resist such labels and indeed question initiatives that link them as individuals with programmes which clearly aim to interrogate diversity based on those criteria. Illustrating the identity crisis existing between North and Southern Africa, Mutua has noted:

Countries like Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Libya, and Tunisia are African by geography but Arabian by culture. There is no denying that some people in these "African" countries are very offended when referred to as Africans instead of Arabs. Personally, I consider Hussein Mubarak, the president of Egypt to be an Arab. He is very active in settling disputes in the Middle East as compared to his obscure involvement in "black-african" affairs. However, when it benefits them, these countries will not hesitate to classify themselves as African and identify with Sub-Saharan Africa. All in all, it is up to these countries to define their identity by their interests and actions. (Mutua, 2004)

The Evolution of Concepts of Diversity

Another useful framework for understanding the concept of diversity is to trace the various forces that have led to its emergence as a key organisational concept. Morrison, Lumby & Sood (2006) have identified five critical assumptions about society and organisations that are driving diversity to the top of the research agenda in matters of educational leadership.

- The growing multicultural nature of society. Wars, economic differentials between nations, natural disasters, political persecution and globalisation have increased the rate of human movement across national boundaries in the last decade. The net movement has largely been from underdeveloped third world countries to the richer nations of the west. This phenomenon is creating new societies and communities which are increasingly diverse, multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural. The growing multicultural nature of societies is driving human demographic changes and workforce dynamics at organisational levels and is becoming a force for a new leadership and management culture in contemporary organisations.
- A growing focus on inclusion and widening participation in post compulsory education. Based on political, economic, equity and social justice, social capital and life long learning rationales (Maringe & Fuller, 2007), inclusion and widening participation agendas acknowledge the increasing diversity of contemporary societies and the need to facilitate broad based participation in post school learning among different societal groups. The social face of post school learning environments has been changed as a result and new leadership imperatives are emerging as a consequence.
- A growing accountability culture. A plethora of legislation to uphold societal rights to non discriminatory practice based on race, age, disability and gender among others, has ushered a new era of accountability in post secondary learning sectors. 'The new

legislative imperatives hold all organisations (and all education sectors) to account, not only for their failure to tackle discrimination but also for failure to promote positive action to assist disadvantaged groups'. (Morrison, Lumby & Sood, 2006: 283)

- The increasing marketisation of educational institutions. Expansion, increasing competition and increasing diversity have been identified as the overarching forces of the marketisation of higher education across the world (Smith, Scott & Lynch 1995; Maringe & Foskett, 2002). Adopting a multicultural perspective is increasingly seen as a force for good in promoting the marketability of educational institutions. Consequently, promoting diversity 'has the potential appeal through the good business argument and for targeting international students'. (Morrison et al. *ibid*)
- Power of the diversity ethical argument. Working for and with diversity in organisations is an argument which has assumed the same status as working with and for democracy in broader society. It is a perceived force for the good and has robust personal, social, economic, moral and ethical rationales which are difficult to refute.

In response to the changing context, early work on diversity drew inspiration from more established fields of equality and equity in organisations and society in general. These two terms are often used interchangeably, but need careful distinction. There is a large literature offering different conceptualisations and consequent actions relating to equality and equity (Morrison, *in press*).

Lorbiecki and Jack (2000) trace the development of approaches to diversity within business organisations. There is insufficient space in this paper to offer a full discussion of the history. However, for the purpose of examining leadership decision making, it is important to note that most recently the emphasis has moved from earlier legislative insistence that all should be treated the same. The goal has become differentiated opportunities for people to improve their organisational contribution and their life chances in ways which they value. Hence, there is need to celebrate human difference and to work with human heterogeneity in ways which improve peoples' lives whilst also improving the performance of the organisation to which they belong.

In education, organisational changes have tended to focus on bringing about measurable changes in representation in such areas as participation in learning, employment and recruitment of staff and organisational leadership and governance. Equality focuses on quantitative measures which can be addressed through policy initiatives related to, for example, widening participation or staff recruitment. Equity on the other hand can be seen as a qualitative concept used to interrogate issues of justice and fairness of current and future policy and practice. For example, the equity

concept invites us to evaluate the justice and fairness arguments behind policies to support minority or disadvantaged learners, or the recruitment of black leaders in educational settings. The focus of these two concepts is thus distinctly different although they cannot be treated in complete isolation from one another. Secada (1990) suggests that equality establishes the rules which seek to reduce or eliminate differences in the opportunities of groups in society while equity invites us to evaluate the fairness of those rules. The equality approach therefore has a clear focus in determining whether different groups within organisations are adequately represented in decision making groups.

Research undertaken within this framework in the education sector has sought to establish, for example, the extent of black leadership participation in FE (CfBSFE, 2002), gender equality in leadership in the FE sector (Shain, 1999) and minority ethnicity participation in FE leadership (Mackay & Etienne, 2006). On the other hand, research focusing on the more qualitative concept of equity, has tended to address issues of group achievement, effectiveness and outcomes following attempts to incorporate aspects of diversity. For example, Milliken & Martins' (1996) research suggests that the impact of diversity on group functioning can be both positive or negative and that 'the nature of the diversity (the characteristics involved) and the extent of diversity (the number of people with minority characteristics within the group) will be important factors in whether the outcomes of diversity are positive or negative in terms of group effectiveness' (Lumby et al., 2007:7).

Lumby et al. (2007) established the following emerging understandings from research on diversity:

- Traditional leadership skills established in relation to a homogeneous leadership do not necessarily work in diverse organisations;
- Diverse groups can outperform homogeneous groups but often do not achieve their full potential;
- The integration of diversity is crucial to performance;
- Integration involves establishing inclusive group interaction processes including, critically, good communication and agreed rules for working, where difference can be cherished.

In this paper we have adopted a definition of diversity which acknowledges the importance of working with and for the visible forms of human difference while understanding the limitations and affordances of this new kind of working within organisations. Our definition thus embeds both equality and equity notions as important ideas in working with issues of diversity in organisations.

We consequently define diversity operationally as attention to both the full range of characteristics and attributes which differentiate current and potential leaders and to the socially constructed advantage and disadvantage which attach to such differences.

Essentially therefore, diversity is a concept denoting the need to acknowledge, celebrate and work productively with difference or heterogeneity of both the transparent and opaque human characteristics within an organisation.

However strong the forces impelling engagement with diversity and equality, the practical response by organisations is fraught with many difficulties and challenges. The focus on organisational decision making which this paper pursues is an attempt to clarify one of the challenges which leaders are likely to encounter and to provide support for reflection and action.

Leadership

Because of the focus on organisational leadership, it is important to briefly outline our position on this concept. There is not space to fully rehearse the very many and contested conceptualisations of leadership (Collinson & Collinson, 2005.) It is sufficient here to distinguish two important aspects of leadership. The first is that of providing direction, organisational vision and making related decisions about resource allocation and distribution. Leaders achieve this in a variety of ways. Some use autocratic or dictatorial means, while others utilise democratic or laissez faire approaches (Bernhard & Walsh, 1995; Marrelli, 1997). These leadership styles utilise different sources of power and impact differently on the levels and extent to which staff consider themselves as making a contribution to organisational decision making. Both the quality and extent of staff participation in decision making tends to wane as we move across the continuum from laissez faire to autocratic leadership. The second aspect of leadership is the issue of control and exerting influence. Both aspects of leadership involve power and the ability to obtain, retain and move resources (Menke & Ogborn, 1993). Power can be used to enforce decisions and ends that may be desired or undesired by particular individuals or groups. Power can also be shared with the group so that members can have equal participation in decision making. Variations in power distribution in decision making are foundational in the development of numerous concepts of leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Beare et al. 1997; Brunner, 2000 & 2002; Foskett and Lumby 2003; Goldring & Pasternak, 1994; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

A key variation within the competing concepts is the level of focus from strategic to operational and the degree of inclusion in decision making. For leaders in contemporary educational institutions, selecting optimum decision making processes in an increasingly heterogeneous context has

become a central concern (Elsass and Graves, 1997). Given the complexity of institutions in the sector and the diverse characteristics, needs and predispositions of its staff and students, what mechanisms could leaders utilise to facilitate effective and efficient decision making? Synthesising research on diversity and on leadership, for purposes of this paper, we have adopted a definition of leadership which highlights the need to enable people within the organisation to make decisions related to both organisational and personal challenges.

There is, of course, the possibility of goal conflict and differing goal allegiance or prioritisation amongst individuals and groups. Nevertheless, the greatest leadership challenge lies in getting the best from people for themselves and for the organisation they serve. Put in other terms, how can leadership be utilised to empower people to make local decisions for the good of the organisation and for their own good as well? This key question leads us directly to the concept of decision making.

Decision Making

Following Elsass & Graves (1997) who contend that the heart of leadership is decision making, and assuming that the key decisions are increasingly being decentralised to individuals and groups within organisations, it is important to understand how the increasing diversity in the sector relates to FE Colleges' decision making capacity.

Decision making can be considered at three main levels; at the personal level, the individual goes through a generic problem solving cycle to make choices about the personal issues for which they seek solutions. Depending on the complexity of the decision and on the time and other resources available, personal decisions fall within a continuum from highly structured and rational to unstructured and irrational (Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 2001). At an aggregate or small group level, the tendency is to incorporate more structured approaches which generally, at least in aspiration, involve rational problem solving strategies and relate to operational issues. The third level comprises decisions made on behalf of the organisation which tend to be more strategic and generally involve those, such as the senior management team, who carry strategic responsibility for their organisation.

A unifying aspect of all decision making is captured by Bernhard (2006) who defines this concept as the process through which individuals, groups or teams arrive at implementable outcomes from a range of competing choices about issues in their organisations. The key phrases in this definition are 'implementable outcomes' and 'from a range of competing choices' as these imply that decisions are never made until they have been implemented and that decisions arise from clear choices made between sets of potential solutions to a given problem. The degree to which people feel able to

contribute to this process of making choices between possible solutions is often considered a key indicator of the decision quality. In general, people want to become involved with decision making, especially if the perceived outcomes of the decisions have a bearing on their private and public lives as members of the organisation. Hoffberg & Korver (2006: 13) have identified four key decision paradoxes which they describe as '...irreconcilable polarities that demand that the leader make conscious tradeoffs to balance conflicting needs within the decision process itself...'. These are:

- ***Inclusion versus efficiency.*** Leaders often agonise over whether they need to involve everybody to make a decision; that is whether they could eliminate the fuss of dialogue and debate and make the decision on their own. Inclusive decision making can be costly in terms of time resources, but invites diversity of views arguably increasing the quality of the decision. Evidence suggests that the more strategic decisions tend to be, the greater reliance is made of efficiency over inclusion. Conversely, when decisions are largely operational, leaders tend to prefer inclusion over efficiency. (Hoffberg & Korver: *ibid*)
- ***Empowerment versus control.*** Leaders must choose the extent of delegation of responsibility for decision making from problem framing to decision announcement. Some leaders prefer to delegate, allowing appropriately experienced staff to act autonomously. Other leaders will seek to be involved in all decisions at every stage.
- ***Instinct versus method.*** Experienced leaders believe they 'know what to do' in certain circumstances and can rely on instinct to arrive at a decision. The implication is that such leaders will prefer to use experience and speedily impose solutions for emerging problems, measuring, learning and adjusting as they go. Others will be more cautious, preferring to employ a methodical approach to every situation, considering alternatives, risks and opportunities before a decision is taken.
- ***Head versus Heart.*** the dilemma here is that of problem solving through creativity and divergent thinking on the one hand, or on emotion and compassion on the other. Leaders must choose the degree to which their own and other's emotional preferences and needs influence or override more rational considerations.

The ends of the spectrum are suggested to be mutually exclusive as you cannot be, for example, inclusive and efficient at the same time. No universal judgment about their worth can be imposed as each is validated by different values and under different circumstances. In the final analysis, leaders may have to decide between two competing values in decision making; efficiency and social

cohesiveness. The challenge for leaders is that of finding the right balance between these two competing values in decision making; that is, being efficient and allowing maximum people involvement in organisational decisions at the same time. Of course there are contrary positions, that inclusion is an essential element of efficiency (Fullan, 2003; Sergiovanni, 1993). Nevertheless our data and earlier studies have supported Hoffberg & Korver (2006), in that some FE leaders, especially senior leaders, claim that taking decisions themselves or in an exclusive group is essential for the successful conduct of business and to achieve performance gains (Lumby, 2001).

The key point here is that the choice of approach to decision making is particularly relevant to leading within diverse contexts. Elsass and Graves (1997:946) conclude their study on demographic diversity in decision making groups with an assertion:

Only when each and every member of the group enjoys high quality task and social interactions can the full benefits of diversity be realised.

If one of the key advantages of diversity is argued to be improving decisions by incorporating differing life experience, community knowledge and market knowledge in the process, then inclusive decision making is essential.

Models of Decision Making

Although a multiplicity of organisational decision making models exist, they fall into three broad categories, each with its own set of assumptions and criteria for effectiveness.

- ***Rational decision-making models*** (Allison, 1971; Lyles & Thomas, 1998): these models are based on an economic view of decision making, grounded on goals/objectives, alternatives, consequences and optimality. They assume that full information about the problem is available, that alternative solutions are assessed and evaluated before an optimum solution is identified for implementation. The key advantage associated with the rational models is that they are seen as logical in that they use a sequential approach based on authentic information. The model assumes that individuals in the decision making group do not bring their own intrinsic biases to the decision making process.
- ***Political decision making models*** (Schneider, Shawver & Martin, 1993): unlike rational approaches, political models highlight the issue of people's preconceptions and biases in the decision making process. The decision makers act on and are motivated

by their own needs and perceptions. The process often involves bargaining among decision makers to get group acceptance of their own particular choice. Furthermore political models tend to involve some level of deception in that full information is sometimes not made available or deliberately withheld in order to give advantage to preferred perspectives. The advantages associated with political models are that they acknowledge the importance of personal subjective perspectives in decision making and have been found to reduce unnecessary conflict as long as powerful people within the organisation have been swayed to the position of the key decision maker. Lahti (1996) argues that this approach to decision making mirrors more closely the way the world operates i.e. a cycle of bargaining related to personal agendas. However, political models do not guarantee optimum solutions for the organisation. Furthermore, the bargaining and social pressure associated with political models may produce long lasting and detrimental effects within the organisation through eroding people's confidence.

- ***The precedent models:*** this is a group of models which value the significance of precedent and past experience. There is an assumption that organisational problems are predictable and that there will have been similar ones in the past to refer to in current circumstances. These models utilise pre-established guidelines and procedures as a consistent foundation for current decision making. The advantage is that solutions are likely to be tried and tested but the disadvantage is that there is a suppression of innovation and new ideas. Younger and newer members to the organisation may feel alienated from an organisation that is so steeped in the past.

There are also models of anarchic decision making, but as these by definition do not include a deliberate process, they are not considered here (Cohen. & March, 1986). There is a substantial literature on the factors which influence leaders' adoption of the models (Evans and House 1996; Fielder, 1967; Hersey & Blanchard 1969). While there is no space for a full discussion, a key focus of this paper is to understand how diversity relates to the decision making processes of colleges in the FE sector and whether any of the models outlined is particularly useful to increase understanding and support practice. To inform this process it is important to consider the available evidence regarding the impact of diversity on decision making.

Research evidence on the value of diversity to decision making

Evidence on the value of diversity to organisational decision making is patchy and rather mixed. The increasingly diverse nature of work place groups and teams has been documented since the late 1980's at least (Jackson, May & Whitney, 1995; Johnson & Packer, 1987). Since then, numerous writers have suggested that diverse teams may be advantageous to organisations, especially in performing decision making tasks (Watson, Kumar and Michaelsen, 1993; Lumby et al, 2005). Diverse decision-making group members bring different experiences, values, perspectives, expertise and orientations to the complex decision making processes which lead to the identification and critical examination of diverse decision alternatives which may in turn create performance gains (Jackson et al. 1995; Watson et al., 1993).

On the other hand, evidence exists which suggests more negative aspects of diversity in group decision making. Pfeffer (1983) for example argues that conflict associated with organisational heterogeneity results in fragmented organisations that are difficult to manage. Wagner, Pfeffer and O'Reilly (1984) also concluded that dysfunctional group processes such as conflict and miscommunication may tend to compromise group outcomes.

Other studies have focused on aspects of gender and ethnicity in diverse decision making groups and established that women and people of colour especially are likely to be marginalised in diverse decision making groups (Ibarra, 1992; Konrad, Winter & Gutek, 1992) since societal norms, together with racioethnic and gender differences in the distribution of resources have created a hierarchy of roles that formally and informally award greater status and authority to white men (Elsass & Graves 1997:947).

The evidence on the advantages of greater diversity to decision making is therefore contradictory. However, the evidence on widespread exclusion from decision making of those who are not part of the dominant group appears incontrovertible (DiTomaso & Hooijberg, 1996; Bauman, 2004; Milliken & Martins, 1996).

To enable analysis of the impact of diversity on decision making in the FE sector, we draw from the work of Hoffberg and Korver (2006) who have developed an integrated decision making model. The model has six elements which are summarised below:

- ***Developing the decision frame:*** the objective of the decision frame is to create the conditions for all people concerned with the decision to build common representations on the issue. The decision frame also sets boundaries and rules for decision makers to work with and explore alternatives. Key activities associated with decision framing include: identifying and articulating the problem in an unambiguous way; assessing the business situation; determining the success criteria; identifying uncertainties and generating alternatives.
- ***Deciding on the people to be involved in the decision making:*** the underlying principle is to ensure representative participation or involvement of all individuals and groups who may be interested in or impacted upon by the decision, bearing in mind that, frequently, organisational decisions have impact beyond the boundaries of the organisation. Knowledge, experience, expertise and interest are important considerations in people decisions.
- ***Working out the decision processes:*** this involves mobilising, developing or utilising available organisational structures for decision making, creating teams for various tasks, deciding on timing, resources and patterns of working.
- ***Generating and evaluating alternatives:*** decisions are always the result of choices. Potential solutions to the problem can be carefully analysed and evaluated against identified criteria which could include costs, risks, and assessment of impacts, time and resources required.
- ***Values integration:*** the underlying values of the decision should be determined, decided and agreed before the decision is made.
- ***The decision aftermath:*** developing systems for communicating, implementing, and evaluating and adjusting the decision.

These six elements will be used as an analytical frame to explore the data from the case colleges.

Exploring decision making in Further Education

Methods and data analysis approaches

A detailed description of the research methods can be found in the main report (Lumby et al., 2007) accessible at www.lum.lancs.uk/files/ce1/10769/download . In summary, a case study approach was used to gather data from leadership groups which included senior management, faculty, programme and business support units within five FE colleges. In each college, data were gathered through observation of three leadership group meetings and interviews with 12 individuals identified by the colleges as representing a variety of roles and features of diversity. In total therefore, 15 group meetings involving almost 150 participants were observed and 67 individual interviews were undertaken.

Table 1 in Annex 1 summarises the specific questions used to guide the extraction of data from the full dataset. The questions were developed to contribute to the aim of integrating diversity in leadership within the FE sector and were specifically framed to address key aspects of the integrated decision making model we have adopted in this paper.

Findings in each of these areas of organisational decision making are presented in the section which follows.

Research Findings: Decision making in Further Education

Developing the decision frame

In terms of their role in decision framing, staff had varying opinions. Despite the existence of apparently inclusive decision making structures in the case colleges, staff were frequently critical of the covert machinations they perceived as existing within the environment. Gender emerged as a significant issue. Generally, decision making teams, especially those at senior management level were considered as '*White English male- dominated closely knit units and cut from the same cloth*'. Both in terms of observable and underlying diversity features, decision making teams were considered as gendered spaces, with a biased and predictable ethnic composition, exhibiting similar middle class values and keen to maintain a status befitting their privileged positions. Thus despite the increasing numbers of female employees in the FE sector where the female population outstrips that of their male counterparts, resulting in what has been termed the 'feminisation of educational environments' (Jha & Kelleher 2006: 43), senior management decision making teams continue to reflect a male dominance in the sector. Some female leaders in the colleges seem resigned to their perceived place as second class citizens in work environments in which they are demographically dominant. One female leader captured this sense of resignation poignantly:

They ask all the questions, supply all the answers and often leave you in limbo... we get by keeping quiet and let them get on with it. (Female middle leader)

One strategy for female survival in this male dominated world seems to be that of maintaining rather than interrogating the status quo.

Despite the presence of women in senior roles, higher decision making levels were generally seen as pressured interrogatory environments, male dominated and often cast in masculine banter centered on a 'footballing' culture from which females felt excluded. Maintaining a 'quiet diplomacy' was often seen as the least risky strategy for female survival in these closely knit 'old school boy' senior management decision making environments. Middle and operational level decision making environments tended to be differently perceived. The predominance of female leaders at this level was widely acclaimed, notwithstanding the occasional derisory comments from some male

commentators. The positive assessment of the impact of female dominance in these levels of decision making was captured by a member of staff in a college where 70 per cent are females:

There is a female sense about teaching here, women in high positions, which is nice and gives a sense of, ... makes other women feel fairly strong in their positions... they get the job done and without making too much noise about it either. (Female middle leader)

While male led decision making spaces were often seen as combative masculine environments, female led decision making spaces tended to be described in language which highlighted empathy, accommodation and inclusivity. While the composition of decision making groups remained unrepresentative, the framing of problems and issues requiring decisions would remain exclusive rather than inclusive.

Deciding on the people to be involved in the decision making

Allied to the above, the extent of demographic integration in decision making groups within the sector was of interest. Key compositional factors relate to readily detectable and underlying features of diversity. Overall, staff felt that much had already been achieved through addressing readily detectable aspects of diversity within decision making groups in the sector. However, there was an overwhelming view that underlying diversity features were more important than readily detectable features in constituting decision making group membership:

It is not so much whether a person is black or white, male or female, disabled or not... it is what people can bring to the table... their skills, competences, experience... (Female middle leader)

However, the data also evidenced that the perceived observable identity of an individual influenced how their competence was assessed (Lumby et al, 2007). Being perceived as 'other' than the majority or dominant group was linked to a lower level of competence in the perception of some. Stressing competence as the primary criterion for entry to decision making was therefore not the neutral position it might appear. Equally, micropolitical and social capital counted. A black middle leader rejected the advice received on the Black Leadership Training initiative:

I went to a black managers thing and they said, 'oh, you have to network' and I had to smile and I said; 'I am not kissing no butt' and they said, 'you have to if you want to get on'... and I said, 'I don't want to get on then, I want ability, competence...' and I stopped going to those meetings.

Available evidence on group composition and its impact on decision making is not extensive and sometimes contradictory (Jackson, May & Whitney 1995). Effective group composition for decision making may be contingent on the context and the nature of the decision to be made. Therefore, the task to be accomplished and the group relations required to accomplish the task are key considerations for membership to decision making groups. The problem is who decides what tasks need resolving within an organisation and the composition of groups to deal with those tasks. Our research shows that many staff outside the senior level and especially those of minority ethnic origin see an unevenness in the allocation and distribution of decision making opportunities within the sector:

There is for everyone to see a deliberate policy to create equality in the college, but equality stops when decisions about promotion to higher grades are made. Much depends on who you are and on the connections you have with those at the top. (Male first line leader)

The glass ceiling effect was frequently mentioned to describe this unevenness:

Equality ends when it comes to promotion, there is little hope for seeing what lies beyond the glass ceiling for black leaders, no matter how hard one tries. (Female first line leader)

Overall, our research shows that, while there is a greater heterogeneity in middle and first line level decision making groups in the colleges, the higher level decision teams are considered as ring fenced and privileged pockets of power and influence to which some people have little or no hope of gaining access.

Working out the decision processes

Organisational structures within colleges in the FE sector represent a combination of formal and informal systems through which individuals and groups make and execute decisions on behalf of their institutions. The processes for college decision making are a key element in any attempt to integrate diversity into the leadership and management of the sector.

Formal hierarchies

The diversity of leaders decreases through the pyramid of seniority. The main report notes that as diversity is largely evident lower down the leadership hierarchy, processes which concentrate decisions at the top will as a result tend to exclude diversity from decisions. The case colleges had strongly demarcated hierarchies related to decision processes (Lumby et al., 2007):

People do not always have equal influence... this is because there is a hierarchical nature to the organisation where access, direct access I mean, to people can be limited by the position occupied in the hierarchy. (Middle leader)

A second element in decision processes emerged from the observation of leadership meetings. Embedding strong accountability pressures, a single individual was often held responsible for a particular decision or initiative. Consequently, one to one exchanges were very frequent within group meetings. Decisions resulted from the interaction of two staff in a more and a less senior role. The meetings therefore seemed often a convenience where the Chair was able to hold numerous one to one conversations in one place at one time. While information was shared, decisions were often not; they did not emerge from discussion amongst the group. Consequently diverse views and experience were unlikely to be utilised fully. Further, there was some evidence that the perspective of middle and first line leaders was distrusted as it was perceived by more senior staff as reflecting a bias that was too influenced by their own area of operation or personal interests. A paradox results; minority views are useful in that they present new ways of interpreting problems and offering solutions different to that of the majority group; however minority views are not useful specifically because they represent the particular view of a subgroup of people. Value judgments are brought to bear in legitimising one set of views over another, such as assumptions that the decisions of senior leaders are necessarily less biased than those of other staff:

a subtle but powerful way to make decisions through closely connected people who assume they are doing things for the greater good. (Middle leader)

Informal hierarchies

Informal hierarchies were also in operation. Staff create and mutate multiple identities to construct, maintain and enhance self-worth and status in the eyes of others (Lumby et al, 2007; Morrison et al, 2007; Stets & Harrod, 2004). The relevance of the concept of identity is that it places each individual within a system of negotiated, fluid choices which are in part controlled by the individual and in part imposed (Bauman 2004; Goffman, 1959). The resulting identity places one in

the informal hierarchy and so offers or denies access to decision making, that is as defined early, not only being listened to, but the resulting decision being implemented. Decision processes were perceived to be powerfully subject to the informal hierarchy. Most staff believed they were listened to; that is others would politely focus on them and what they were saying. Not all believed that this amounted to being heard; that is the actions which were implemented did not relate to the conversations held. *'Things that are not prioritised by SMT don't happen'*. Rather decision implementation related to the identities and power of individuals. Creating and receiving sound does not amount to mutual decision making, only to courtesy.

Generating and evaluating alternatives

As noted in the section on framing decisions, staff felt a sense of being excluded from the processes which are aimed at identifying, contextualising and defining problems needing local solutions within their institutions. However, this sense was not universal across the variety of decision making structures, with many feeling a greater sense of inclusion in first line decision making groups with a broadly operational remit while significantly more felt excluded from more senior leadership decision making groups and strategic decisions. This exclusivity was captured in a variety of ways but always highlighting the power concentration at the centre rather than at the periphery. A first line leader noted:

Most decisions are manipulated to reflect the needs of those in the inner circle... decisions are made and meetings tend to be used to rationalise, endorse or rubberstamp them.

Another in a different college bemoaned the lack of involvement of first line staff in crucial institutional decisions:

We as staff feel the decisions senior managers make really do not involve teachers, the teaching staff enough. Things will get done and then they ask you your opinion about it. Obviously it should be the other way round. You should ask staff first about the things and systems, then implement it...tends to be teacher responding instead of teachers playing an active part in deciding on the processes...

However, in first line decision making groups, staff felt a greater sense of inclusion which seemed to be due to a number of factors. First was the nature of decisions at this level which seemed to necessitate a more participative involvement of staff at operational level:

In the department, we deal with issues of resource allocation to individual tutors, time tabling, assessment issues and the like. Few leaders would like to dictate these kinds of issues to staff as they personally and directly affect peoples' daily routines and operations... we find that we are a closely knit unit and utilise both formal and informal opportunities to determine the way forward. (First line departmental leader)

Others perceived that the perception of equality amongst group members, perhaps in the sense of educational attainment or experience facilitated a more collaborative approach to decision making. Collins (1984:35) suggests that insufficient inter-group confidence and empathy among members generates passivity, withdrawal and undermines the solidarity, cohesiveness and energy of the group. On the other hand, where group members share a sense of equality and common focus, there tends to be generation of a social energy that animates the group to cherish a sense of working together for the common good:

...think we are pretty equal. I would not like to say some are more influential than others. I would like to think that if I present something, it is given due consideration... As a team, we work together well. We have known each other for a long time and got confidence in each other...we are aware of our own and other's individual strengths and weaknesses and have got mutual respect... no power struggle, we are united. (First line departmental leader)

Size of groups also seemed to be an important factor. Generally, departmental decision making groups were small (about 10 people in many cases) while faculty middle management groups were often large (sometimes more than 40 members). Bigger groups were seen as alienating, intimidating and more often than not, as offering fewer opportunities for discussion. They were information directed:

Large groups are very formal. If I wanted to say something to AP (Assistant Principal), it would not be in a large group meeting... everyone is there, it is no time to chat and talk back but a time to listen to the information and take it on. Transmission of information...most definitely! The quieter you are, the sooner you go home...(Middle leader)

And in terms of their perceived influence on decision making, working in large groups constrains the opportunity to generate and evaluate alternate solutions as part of the decision making process:

I think... large group meetings, our behaviour is I think, expected to be sit down, be well behaved and turn up on time, be quiet...

Thus large group meetings, though rhetorically promoted as important, are viewed by many as a waste of time since they tend to have a ritualistic information dissemination role rather than a discursive decision making focus. Many staff see them as rubber stamping ceremonies for decisions made elsewhere and for which staff, especially those in lower ranks, have little more involvement than their mere presence.

Values integration

A range of values were identified by staff which had an influence on the decision making capacity of groups and teams within the case colleges. A key concern for senior leadership groups is the idea of operational excellence, and a production oriented approach to decision making which values efficiency. While group heterogeneity was highly valued by senior managers and leaders, it could be argued that SMT staff were often outcomes focused and this was in tension with concern with process and especially with the inclusion of more directly observable characteristics of diversity in decisions. Addressing the issue of diversity and its importance, the emphasis on production or productivity was noted by a senior leader:

Diversity is much more than responding to generic categories... it is about what people can bring to the table... and how they can drive the institution forward... it would be a travesty if people became appointed to leadership roles solely on the basis of say their ethnic origin... there has to be a demonstrable ability to handle the responsibility.

The values here prioritised in depoliticised judgments are competence and performance. However, for staff lower down the ranks, the concern was more about categorical group composition to create 'a balanced representation of people from different backgrounds' which often meant more women in SMTs, better ethnic representation in leadership teams and positions and a leadership composition within the sector that broadly reflects the racial and ethnic composition of the student and staff body. Representation, and through this social cohesion and links to the community were the prioritised values. For senior managers and leaders, doing things efficiently is about assigning responsibilities to

selected and trusted colleagues who report to the rest of the staff and keep the wheels of the organisation turning. The system of allocating responsibility to specific individuals to oversee the implementation of decisions is fairly widespread in the sector and has been variously described as dispersed or distributed leadership. Effectively, this is a subtle way of concentrating power at the centre through the involvement of like minded people handpicked by senior staff to oversee decision making across the organisation. This careful albeit subtle allocation of power disenfranchises a significant percentage of staff within the sector. Many minority staff felt that '*equality ends at the doorstep of promotion*' because '*as long as you are black; your chances of becoming involved as a senior manger are very small*'.

There is a case for values divergence within different leadership levels in the sector. In senior leadership groups, expertise, experience and ability are highly valued and individuals who possess these qualities tend to be listened to more and are also seen by others as making significantly more contributions to decisions at various levels. On the other hand, in middle and first line decision making groups, collaboration, broad based group approaches and involvement appear to be the cherished ideals in decision making. Senior managers value outcomes more while rank and file staff seem to be more concerned with process. This is symptomatic of the various decision dilemmas discussed earlier and specifically demonstrates the inclusion versus efficiency paradox (Hoffberg & Korver (2006: 13).

The emotional energy of decision making teams also helps to illustrate the values divergence in different leadership levels. Senior leadership decision making spaces were often described as '*high pressure, high stress and interrogative*'. The process is not always seen as conducive to effective strategic planning and often staff strategies are described which are linked to a feigned '*matter of factness*', not expressing emotion and not volunteering unsolicited information. On the other hand, middle and first line level decision making spaces were described as being '*more casual, accepting, and collaborative*'. Barbalet (1998) finds that people feel more drawn to passivity in pressurised decision making environments and to enhanced activity in less pressured environments.

Decision aftermath

Decision communication is at the heart of success or failure of change efforts within organisations. Amongst staff in the case colleges, there was a widespread view from teaching staff that in reality, communication was relatively closed and one way and that some decision outcomes were not adequately communicated to staff. Because of the prevalence of decision making processes by a select few, the case for effective communication becomes quite urgent as several middle leaders pointed out:

Decisions made outside that are not communicated effectively are the most dangerous.

Danger is that often decisions are made outside the formal structures and are not communicated effectively to people.

A lot of discussion goes on outside meetings and it appears that many decisions are formulated there.

Others saw the lack of inaction by leaders, despite the attention they give to people's ideas as an indictment of the decision process.

Reasonable things that are sensible need to be listened to. The HoD will listen but never does anything about it; it does not go any further as far as the AP.

I did contribute last year...I got very angry about... ridiculous system not worked for years. I went to management (and) after a while a group was set up, but nothing changed. They keep on saying they will do something about it...I don't think they realise how important this is...

Echoing similar sentiments, another middle leader laid emphasis on the issue of resistance to change by senior managers which stifles institutional development.

Well, it would be nice to put forward and have some kind of response to that. I think there is a disinclination to change anything. People have been here a long time and don't want to change... they don't like change.

Sometimes representational democracy was seen as not achieving its intended goals. Staff who represented others in decision making teams did not always provide required feedback when it was needed.

One thing we could do, we don't do, is get feedback from members of the meetings. We could probably benefit from that. We might think we are doing a good job and everybody is happy with it, but that is one thing we don't do at the moment. (Middle leader)

Bearing in mind that a decision is never complete until it has been enacted, there is a sense in which staff feel alienated from the processes that are designed to bring about change within their working environments. Indeed, while there is no shortage of structures to make and enact decisions in colleges, staff in middle and first line leadership in institutions do not seem to have a deep sense of being included in the processes that lead to change. There is a public promotion of being inclusive through the creation of decision structures and a culture of listening. However, as long as decisions are not enacted, middle and first line leaders feel that the overt structural differences are designed to preserve a covert cultural sameness which values stability and preservation.

An emerging model for integrating diversity into organisational decision making

The key plank of the argument this paper has developed is that decision making is as much about team composition as it is about the quality of the processes of making decisions themselves. The growing diversity within FE has become the new focus for strategic thinking within the sector. Lumby with Coleman (2007: 122) recognize the significance of diversity and exhort institutional leadership to embrace it wholeheartedly as they assert:

There can be little that offers greater value to an educational community and to wider society than leading for greater equity and inclusion.

Much has already been achieved through equality and anti-discrimination initiatives within the sector. Yet this research shows significant discontent amongst staff about the extent to which leadership and decision making groups at various levels adequately embrace diversity within the sector. We thus propose the following model as a tentative framework for FE leadership to consider in order to enhance the decision making capacity of teams within the sector. The model we propose has three broad elements which interlock with each other to provide a framework for possible integration of diversity into the decision making processes of colleges. We consider both readily detectable and underlying attributes together with issues of multiple identities as critically important in constituting groups for decision making for a variety of purposes. However, groups and teams do not work in a vacuum but rather within an organisational and leadership culture characterised by a system of both complementing and conflicting values. Such value systems need to be understood as they will have an impact on the decision processes and outcomes. Having made considerations at these critical levels, teams can then follow a feed-forward and feedback decision making process. The above is proposed as a hypothetical model based on both theoretical and empirical evidence, but still requiring testing and possible further development in many decision making environments within the sector. We however believe that it provides a useful framework for staff to work more meaningfully for the integration of diversity into leadership within the sector.

Figure 1: Integrating diversity in leadership decision making

Organisational problems and challenges can be more efficiently and effectively interrogated
by people

Who exhibit a wide range of diversity in the forms of

single and multiple identities readily observable identities covert identities

Incorporating deliberate values integration

Through key processes of

Decision framing

Managing decision aftermath

Creating Decision structures

Implementing solutions

Developing alternative solutions

Integrating values

Applying the model to leadership decision making

In organisational contexts, models can be notorious for misrepresenting the truth, but they help us to develop valid perspectives about issues and processes within organisation. Given the empirical basis upon which this model was developed and the extent to which it provides a broad framework for integrating diversity in leadership, it can be considered a valid framework with which to seek the elusive goal of integrating diversity into leadership decision making processes in the FE sector.

The model brings together three key elements to decision making as discussed below.

1. Focus on the nature, extent and exigencies of diversity in the organisation

Current perceptions and characterization of leadership decision making spaces as monolithic middle class male dominated terrains is an indictment of the reality of demographic heterogeneity and the complexity of variation within the sector. Organisational leaders are judged, among other things, by the decisions they make. To that end, leaders strive to make competent decisions, decisions which add value to the organisational mission and objectives while promoting the cause of the groups and individuals who help make those decisions. In doing so, leaders come face to face with a range of dilemmas or decision paradoxes, (Hoffberg and Korver 2006) which create polarities of conflicting needs within the decision process. However, we suggest that these dilemmas should not be seen as representing opposing choices for leaders, but as reflecting the range of diversity which need to be incorporated into decision making processes. Not all decisions call for inclusive debate all the time. But all decisions require inclusive acknowledgement by all members of the organisation on which the decision impacts. An example will help illustrate this point. The decision to have a Black Leadership Development Programme is increasingly being seen as discriminatory on both sides of the racial divide in colleges. Black managers may see it as part of a deficit professional development model which entrenches beliefs about cultural capital deficiencies among black members of staff. On the other hand, white members of staff may consider the exclusive provision as discriminating against them and sidelining them from what could be potentially beneficial to their career learning and progression. This is an issue which requires greater consultation and debate. In this regard, efficient decision making is measured, not in terms of the utilization of minimum resources to effect decisions, but on the basis of the breadth and depth of consultation to arrive at competent organisational decisions.

In addition, in constituting decision making groups, our model suggests that leaders could consider issues of diversity from different perspectives. While competence, expertise and experience should remain priority considerations in appointments to leadership positions and decision making roles, the assessment of such qualities needs to take account of the implications of the visible, covert and multiple identity characteristics of individuals. First, identity may influence the judgment of

competence; discrimination persists. Second, in a sector that is increasingly heterogeneous, the importance of individual competence needs to be balanced with creating groups which may be more competent corporately; that is, the sum of a number of homogeneous individuals each of whom are chosen for their excellence may be less than the sum of heterogeneous individuals where 'excellence' is measured against wider criteria. The added value of heterogeneity may be greater than the sum total of individual homogeneous competence. Additionally there is the importance to the organisation and the community of reflecting the diversity of staff, students and the community.

2. Promoting values integration

An important dimension of the diversity of decision groups is the values held by its members as an inclusive group, as individuals and as pockets of individuals sharing both common beliefs internally and divergent values externally. Our study shows that the broader group values are often subordinate to those of micro groups within the organisation. Perceptions of decisions made outside the formal decision making structures are highly prevalent within the case colleges and do not seem to promote organisational cohesiveness. In our view, the existence of 'organisational inner circles' is not, in itself, an issue. The issue is failure to incorporate grassroots values in such detached decisions. When staff feel that their views are not important, nor are their opinions sought, or considered, there is a case of values disintegration which does little to promote organisational cohesiveness.

Working for the promotion of interconnectedness of values at the personal, group and organisational levels should thus be at the forefront of leadership thoughts about the constitution and decision processes of leadership decision teams. We do not suggest that this will be an easy process. It will not be straightforward or desirable to do away with inner circles within organisations. They are a fact of life. However, these micro groupings tend to ignore or at least are seen as ignoring the wider consequences of their decisions on others. For key strategic decisions, it will be important to allow organisational staff to debate the pros and cons of various decision alternatives including the preferred executive decision before it is fully implemented. Even if senior executive consider that pushing a decision against subordinate staff wishes is in the best interest of the organisation, the subordinate staff could still be allowed the opportunity to discuss the implications before full scale implementation. For example, in many of the colleges, the issue of ethnic representation in senior management teams was fairly prominent. Although it was generally felt that colleges were making progress on equality and equity issues, there remained pockets of considerable discontent especially among minority staff regarding issues of promotion to senior positions specifically, and about the extent and quality of consultation on key institutional decisions in general. Personal, interpersonal and group values are thus important considerations in setting up decision making teams and incorporating into the processes of decision making. The issue of values divergence

between SMT s and lower decision making teams places colleges under considerable strain. There is a greater tolerance for autonomy and informality in SMT s given the investment in experience, expertise and ability in the leaders. Lower down the management structures; collegiality, collaboration and involvement seem to be more highly prized. Colleges thus have two potentially opposing value systems which act as filters for institutional decisions. A starting point for bringing these value systems together is a realization of their existence and the importance attached to them by different groups within the institution.

3. Establishing inclusive models for decision making

Inclusive decision making models in our view, place emphasis on the problem, the people and the process in a way which seeks to maximize involvement as a key criterion for quality decisions. At the heart of inclusive decision making is the need to allow for a comprehensive analysis of the problem which entails understanding the problem context and turning the problem into a series of clear questions. Failure to incorporate grassroots involvement in framing the decision problems seems to have an alienating effect on grass roots staff. Involvement is likely to bring about an intersectionality of diversity to problem solving; a confluence of multiple perspectives to the nature of the problem and a likelihood of synergy in bringing about what are likely to be perceived as competent solutions. The proposed cycle is only an example of a decision making process. As this paper has shown, there are various process models to choose from. However, underlying these choices could be the issue of maximizing involvement in problem identification, constituting teams and in the range of key decision activities.

'Headline' Summary and Conclusion

The paper is centrally concerned with identifying mechanisms through which diversity could be integrated into the decision making function in FE colleges. The conclusions from this research relate specifically to the four key aims that guided the investigation.

1. Equity and inclusion as the integrating force

The central problem of this research has been to determine strategies for integrating diversity into leadership decision making in FE colleges. Both the literature reviewed here and our empirical findings suggest the following:

- That leadership which is perceived by subordinates as supporting their best performance is highly valued;
- That getting the best from people involves engaging with their individual and group values;
- A fundamental value is the right to involvement in key organisational decisions especially when the decisions are perceived as impacting directly or indirectly on them as individuals or as groups.

Integrating diversity into leadership decision making thus involves developing an organisational ethos which prizes equity and inclusion, seeking to support the best performance of people through valuing them as individuals and as groups and through involving them in key decisions which affect their lives as individuals and as members of the organisation.

2. Problem, people and process as the triad of integration

We see decision making as centrally involving three intricately related elements of problem, people and process. Our research suggests that:

- Staff value being included in identifying and conceptualizing organisational problems, and consider that the existing fracture between leadership and staff is in large part a result of being excluded from the problem framing processes in their organisation.
- Being white, male, middle class, well educated, skilled, highly experienced and well connected appear to be the characteristics of choice for senior leadership roles in the

FE sector. The exclusion of people with other diverse characteristics in these roles is generally seen as not promoting and as not reflective of equity within the sector.

- The decision making process we saw through observation of meetings and about which we heard through interviews appear to be minimally engaging, and overly based on endorsing decisions made elsewhere.

In order to integrate diversity into leadership decision making, we consider problem, people and process as inextricably intertwined triadic elements through which diversity can be meaningfully integrated into the leadership decision making of educational institutions.

3. Diversity: Much to offer but must be managed effectively

Research on the consequences of diversity indicates both potential benefits and challenges. On the weight of evidence, the benefits outweigh the challenges (Brickson, 2000). Advantages include an increase in the quality of group performance through creativity of ideas, cooperation, and the number of perspectives and alternatives considered. However, diverse decision making groups have also been associated with negative outcomes such as increased conflict, inadequate communication and increased marginalization of minority groups (Milliken and Martins, 1996). Therefore, any resolve to integrate diversity into leadership decision making needs to move beyond a determination to achieve representation and to engage with the many process issues that will result from increased diversity.

4. Diversity as the prelude to decision processes

The review of models has identified a wide range of approaches to the process of decision making. At the heart of decision making is the need to arrive at what Bernhard (2006) calls implementable outcomes. Although Hoffberg and Korver (2006) suggest that the process of arriving at these implementable outcomes is fraught with leadership dilemmas (inclusion versus efficiency; empowerment versus control; instinct versus method and head versus heart), we consider these not as opposing polarities but as complementing elements for an integrated model of decision making. Our use of Hoffberg and Korver's (2006) six element model of decision making as an analytic tool to interrogate decision making in the FE sector has enabled us to make the following crucial observations:

- Decision framing remains largely exclusive rather than inclusive with many staff feeling excluded from the processes that identify and conceptualise organisational problems.
- In terms of people involvement, many staff outside senior levels and especially those of minority ethnic origin see an unevenness in the allocation and distribution of decision making opportunities within the sector.

- Decision processes were perceived to be powerfully subject to the informal hierarchy. Despite being listened to, many staff felt that they were not being heard. Thus, while courtesy is widely evident, mutual decision making is broadly perceived to be absent.
- The lack of broad based involvement in decision framing precludes the possibility for creating sufficient opportunities for staff to engage with generating alternatives and discussing them. Large group meetings are often seen as a ritual for rubberstamping decisions made elsewhere.
- FE hierarchical systems seem to us to be characterised by two main opposing value systems which differ in the conceptualisation of efficient decision making. Efficiency for SMTs seems to be based in expertise, experience and ability often locatable in a few exclusive groups of people. Middle and first line leaders consider efficiency to draw more from group effort, collaboration, involvement and group approaches to working. We see this values divergence as a significant source of the perception of lack of inclusivity in the decision making processes in the sector.
- There seems to be a public promotion of being inclusive through the creation of decision structures and a culture of listening. However, there is a damaging perception of lack of decision enactment and inadequate communication of decision outcomes promoting a covert sameness which values stability and preservation over change and innovation.

The above findings suggest that, currently decision making systems within the FE sector are perceived as not adequately integrating diversity into the leadership decision making culture. Our model front loads considerations about diversity as the starting point for making organisational decisions and highlights the importance of embedding variety, inclusion and participation in the identification of organisational problems, the setting up of decision teams and in the actual decision making processes.

In Conclusion

The demographic terrains of FE colleges in the UK have metamorphosed into recognizably heterogeneous entities creating a variety of new leadership challenges. One of these challenges has been identified as the need to integrate diversity into the leadership processes of educational establishments (Lumby with Coleman, 2007). Making decisions is at the heart of these leadership processes. Therefore, as this paper has shown, integrating diversity into leadership decision making is a crucial step in that process. Equity and inclusion in conceptualizing organisational problems; in constituting people teams for the tasks and in the day to day decision process issues, constitute a fundamental basis for integrating diversity into the leadership of further education.

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Annex 1

Table 1: Framework for interrogating diversity in decision making

Elements of integrated decision making	Key questions
Framing the decision	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How did staff feel about their overall decision making environments? 2. Do staff feel that they can make a contribution to the framing of decisions 3. Do they consider decision making structures as suitable for the intended purposes?
People element: group composition for decision making	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is there evidence of demographic integration in decision making groups and how did staff respond to this? 2. What people qualities are considered key for efficient decision making?
Process element: diversity structures for decision making	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the formal and informal structures for decision making in the sector and what are the perceptions of their impact on the quality of decision making? 2. Does group size appear to matter in college decision making within the sector? 3. What are the key elements patterns of interaction observed in team meetings?
Evaluating potential solutions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do staff feel that they make a contribution to the determination of solutions to organisational problems?
Values integration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do staff feel that their own values are considered in the organisational decisions? 2. What values appear to staff to dominate decision making teams and processes? 3. Who seems to control the locus of decision making and how do staff respond to this?
Decision aftermath	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How are decisions communicated and do staff feel well informed of organisational decisions?

Further information and Contact Details

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We recognise that there are many innovative and effective leaders and leadership practices in the Sector that warrant investigation, analysis and wider dissemination of best practice. We would like to engage with existing networks within the Sector and develop a wider practice-led research community contributing to current debates on leadership and other related issues.

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