

Chapter XX

Leading a large and disparate school in higher education

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Introduction.

This chapter introduces the challenges associated with leading a large school in higher education. Because of the disparate nature of education, as well as the fact that the span of control, in other words, the number of people you lead, is very broad, more traditional leadership techniques are unlikely to be successful. Instead, leaders tend to look for more individual solutions to problems and focus on the broader situation in which the problem lies. Fairness is a key concept when using this type of leadership style and it is always important to understand exactly what we mean when we talk about ‘what is fair’.

By the end of the chapter you should be able to explain what we mean by *situational leadership* and able to apply this idea to a case study. You will also be able to explore the ways in which you can aim to ensure that your leadership style is fair for everyone and how you can communicate your ideas to those that you lead in the most effective and efficient way.

Setting the Scene

Nine a.m. and there is a knock at the door, in walks the Social Butterfly, smiling, suggesting a coffee and asking if you have heard who the next Head of the School of Education will be. Grimacing behind your fixed smile, you realise this might well be a lengthy conversation, and your bulging inbox will have to wait a little longer; you look at your watch and resolve to be back in the office in half an hour. Another email pings into your inbox, the Leader is suggesting a new initiative for the School and requesting resources from you. You grab your coat and accompany your smiling employee out of the door. Across the corridor you can see the Harsh Critic in animated conversation with the Introvert; you can hear your name being mentioned and you mentally prepare for a lengthy meeting later where you will remind the Harsh Critic that, despite their worries, they do a great job. As you reach the coffee shop a young, smartly dressed employee greets you with a cheery hello; the recent Graduate has clearly been in work for some time, unlike the hunched figure dashing through the building.

Sighing you remember that the Procrastinator has still not provided you with a summary of their module evaluations.

LaSalle's (2022) typology of employees in the paragraph above might well be rather simplistic in nature, but the caricatures provided in it do give a useful illustration that, in any organisation, the people you lead are not all the same. Many books stress the importance of equity when dealing with employees, but it is equally important to understand that this does not mean that there is one solution to all problems. As we can see above, there is a multitude of different sorts of employees and any team that you lead is likely to be *heterogenic* rather than *homogenous* in nature. As a leader of a diverse workplace you need to show an ability to adapt your style of leadership to accommodate each of these types of employees, whilst maintaining fairness and equity. A common myth about leadership is that you need to ensure that you treat everyone the same in order to maintain fairness, but given the heterogenic nature of the average workplace, counterintuitively, treating people the same actually promotes a lack of equity as you will not be meeting all individual needs. Instead, just like a chameleon changing colour to adapt to its environment, equity is often best served by ensuring that approaches are adapted to the individual and each challenge faced. This is sometimes known as *situational leadership* (Hersey and Blanchard, 1977) and relates to a flexible style of leadership that is popular in schools of education today.

The challenge of leading a large and diverse group of employees has been made even more difficult due to recent events. The Covid-19 pandemic has hastened the move towards a hybrid working model that means that employees may not always be physically present in the building. From a productivity and staff wellbeing perspective this can have significant benefits (Dale, 2020), but it does raise other challenges in ensuring that communication is maintained throughout the school and that there is consistency of culture when employees might only converse through virtual means. The situational leadership model often adopted, also presents a challenge when face-to face meetings are rare, as it is important that there are channels for people to use in order to communicate with anyone in a leadership position in order to ensure that any perceived unfairness is raised and dealt with at the earliest possible opportunity. The increased use of software such as MSTeams and Zoom has helped to facilitate an approach that has been described as *Schrödinger's Leadership* (Wolstencroft, Kivits and de Main, 2021) where the leader can be present when needed, but remains hidden when not. Whilst this approach has gained supporters during the pandemic, it does require more energy from leaders to ensure staff are confident that there is support when called for,

and that new staff are made aware of the ways they can be supported. As with so much of leadership, communication is paramount to ensure that everyone is kept fully informed.

In addition to the increase in remote working, there has also been a move towards larger departments and schools within universities. This is in part for sound business reasons: economies of scale afforded by greater numbers of employees can give both financial and organizational efficiency. However, there is also a pragmatic reason for this. The shortage of teachers in compulsory education is well documented (Gretton and Wolstencroft, 2021), but it is when recruiting for leadership positions that the lack of appointable people coming into the roles is most acute (Weale, 2020). This shortage is mirrored in universities and has been a key driver in the growth in size of departments and Schools within Higher Education.

This chapter looks to assess the challenges posed by managing a large and diverse body of people in higher education. Key concepts explored are those of equity in leadership, diversity of employees, culture within the group and also communication. Throughout the chapter, a case study featuring Mariam, a senior leader in education, will be used to highlight the application of theory in practice

Introducing situational leadership

At this point it is important to talk a little more about situational leadership (Hersey and Blanchard, 1977). This theory suggests that there is no one ‘right’ way of leading. It differs from other theories that stress that a consistent approach works best and can be described as a ‘pragmatic’ approach to leadership. The priority in this approach is to work out what is best for the individual and the environment at any given time.

The situational leadership model was originally known as ‘life cycle theory’ and is split into four styles that can be used across four different situations. The basic concept is that the leader decides where the member of staff is at in the cycle and then adopts that style of leadership. Style 1 (S1) is where the leader needs to provide instructions to staff, taking a *directing approach* and telling staff how to complete a task. In this situation there is little input from the member of staff; the communication is all one way coming from the leader and the leader is making the decisions. When using Style 2 (S2), the leader adopts a *coaching style*. This is useful when a member of staff needs guidance on what to do, but at the same time is fairly competent but wants to learn. The leader needs to allow time for a discussion with the member of staff, although ultimately the leader will still make the decision.

For a leader to adopt the third style (S3), the member of staff must be competent and have the skills and means to complete the task. The aim of the leader in this situation is to take on a *supporting role*, providing encouragement and building confidence. The leader might ask the member of staff how they envisage going about the task and asking if they need any help, but will leave the decision making to the member of staff.

Finally, the fourth style (S4). This style is only used when the member of staff is extremely knowledgeable, motivated and knows exactly how to perform the job. This is a *delegating style* where the leader can just leave the member of staff to get on with the job and to make all the decisions.

For example, some employees might know how to do the job and are competent; so that a ‘carrot’ approach, often associated with S4, can provide motivation, while others need to be kept on task with a more directed ‘stick’ approach and S1 is more appropriate. Hersey and Blanchard also stress that the task to be completed needs to be taken into account when considering the leadership style. So, for example, a time-limited task might need more micro-management (where the performance of the person is monitored on a regular basis) than something where time is less of a factor.

A situational-based approach has many advantages and, given its focus on the task to be completed, is often seen as a very good way to ‘get things done’. However, there are criticisms. The main issue raised is that it can cause a perceived lack of consistency of leadership. If different situations lead to different leadership approaches, then employees can feel unsettled as they are not sure what the reaction of a leader would be to any given event. Imagine if you were being checked up on when completing one task but left alone for another. Whilst there are good reasons for this, the worry is that it might lead to concerns about a lack of fairness. In this situation the leader needs to ensure that lines of communication with staff are clear.

Questions for discussion

Can you think of a task when you want your manager at work to adopt each approach described above? Explain why.

Despite the problems of this approach, there are some significant advantages. Can you think of what they might be?

Situational leadership in practice

Getting communication right

Let's start with how communication is organised in a large school. This is often viewed as the most important part of the role of a leader because, without effective communication channels, it does not matter how good your decisions are, they won't get through to the people who matter; hence nothing will be actioned and the status quo will be maintained. As an example, let's look at the use of a conduit to pass on important messages. In this situation a very direct approach (maybe linked to S1) needs to be taken. The middle manager needs to be given the information and precisely what is expected of them so that it is disseminated across their team. In theory this is a good idea: smaller groups can be gathered together and the workload spread. A typical approach to this would be that the leader would brief the middle managers, perhaps on a change that is required to working practice, and ask them to inform their teams. However, this approach only works when two things happen: first, that everyone actions the plan, and second, that the information is passed on in a way that the message is not distorted. These two points are absolutely crucial for the success of communication. Imagine finding out a week later that only half of your staff have been notified of a change. It would cause chaos and be likely to cause resentment. In short, it only needs one weak link for your communication plan to collapse.

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, communication has had an extra layer of complexity added to it with the greater prevalence of hybrid working (Dale, 2020): informal corridor conversations or chance encounters are less likely to occur and formal communication methods often encompass people spread over a wide geographic area. This does have some advantages as informal corridor conversations have been noted as causing anxiety with some staff when news spreads ahead of any official announcement (Crampton *et al.*, 1998). The added complications in hybrid working and the need to avoid unnecessary anxiety mean that a communication plan becomes a necessity in any large school.

Finally, as with students, staff have a preference as to how they like to receive information. The media available to a school to communicate with its staff has grown exponentially over

the last few years. For many years leaders used face-to-face meetings and email, but now there is a growing choice such as MS Teams, Yammer or Slack, each with their own advantages and disadvantages, and means that leaders need to think about the medium used to communicate messages as well as the message itself.

A basic model of communication was suggested by Schramm (1954) who stressed that communication is a two-way process between a sender and a receiver. The key is to ensure that the message that the sender intends to give is understood by the receiver. This may sound obvious, but the intricacies of the English language mean that we tend to *encode* what we say. If we look at an example, we can see what we mean.

Imagine your lecturer saying to you: “That’s a very interesting approach you have taken”. What message would you take from this? For some people they would be pleased that the creativity of their work is being recognised and they would see the comments from the tutor as praise, but for others the meaning would be far more negative. The word ‘interesting’ is used in a variety of different contexts, sometimes as a ‘softer’ way of raising concerns. Hence, the same words can be decoded in two different ways. If we add in the cultural differences that occur in any international group of people, as well as what Schramm describes as ‘noise’ (which is anything that stops you hearing the meaning of the message), then you can see that communication is not as simple as a conversation between a sender and a receiver. This model also stresses the importance of any communication being two-way. This allows any decoding issues to be minimised and allows the flow of ideas from bottom to top, as well as vice-versa. Research also shows that this approach, allied with developing positive employee relations prior to any negative communication, can alter the way staff receive the message (Young, 2021)

As an illustration of the issues, please consider the following case study.

Mariam looked at the spreadsheet which listed everyone employed within her school: the final total was 150 people spread over four sites. She opened another tab: 30 of those people were fractional so they only worked specific days; others had teaching commitments, childcare issues and a few were either on annual leave or unwell. Next, she turned to the room booker, the maximum size of any room available today was 40.

Sighing, she looked again at the message that she had been asked to ensure that all members of staff were given immediately: there was going to be a restructure of the

organisation and some people would be at risk of losing their jobs. Mariam knew that her staff would not be affected, but employment law meant that everyone must hear the message. It didn't seem right to simply send out an email with the details on it but..... how was she going to convey the message to such a disparate group of people?

Mariam's dilemma is a common one in any large organisation, and should be considered using four lenses:

- 1) Importance of message – given communication is something that happens constantly in our day-to-day lives, there needs to be some ranking of message in terms of how vital it is for it to be received and correctly decoded. A message regarding a temporary closure of a classroom could be sent as an email as the consequences of someone failing to read it are likely to be fairly minimal. However, in Mariam's case, a potential restructuring is something that is vital to be understood by everyone; so an email alone would not be an appropriate form of communication.
- 2) Immediacy of message – consider the difference between receiving a text message and an email. A text message has a high degree of immediacy in that the majority of people check their phones multiple times a day and are likely to respond when a message is received. With emails many people will answer them at a set time (often at either the start or end of the day) and hence, messages with a high degree of urgency are not likely to be sent by email.
- 3) Complexity of message – a risk with any form of communication is that the decoding will not be accurate and hence any messages where there is a high degree of complexity need special attention. A common method of communicating highly complex messages is to break it down into headlines and then add levels of detail behind the headlines so that people who want to delve deeper can do, but you can be sure that anyone who is not as thorough at least gets the key points.
- 4) Expectations of media – we are constantly bombarded with messages, so it is vital to ensure that the right media is used. Recent research suggests that many employees across a range of professions either fail to open emails or ignore the contents if opened (de Gagne, 2020); so using that as a method of communication might well result in the receiver not getting the message and communication being wasted.

These lenses help us understand Mariam’s dilemma: her message is urgent, immediate and complex, but the medium to be used is not straightforward as she can’t rely on just one form. Due to the nature of the message, she can’t merely email people, yet seeing them all face-to-face is not an option; so, alternatives need to be used. Remember that being a good communicator is a vital part of leadership.

Questions for discussion

Now you have had time to read Mariam’s dilemma, what would you do? Using the concept of situational leadership, outline a strategy to ensure that the correct message is received by as many people as possible. Ensure that any potential decoding problems are minimised.

The Importance of Culture

One factor that might help Mariam is our next topic for investigation: the culture of a department. It is undeniable that the culture within a school and a department has a strong relationship with how effectively the school is run. A department and school that values the development of its teachers, promotes collegiality and collaborative leadership is one that should demonstrate effectiveness (Gulsen and Celik, 2021). However, this is not always understood by all leaders; Warrick (2017) reports that many leaders lack the awareness of how significantly organisational culture can affect the workplace.

So, what exactly is culture? In simple terms culture describes the environment in which we work, often characterised as ‘the way we do things round here’ (Bower, 2003). Most theory suggests that culture is set by the leadership of the organisation and is something that is seen as a ‘construct’. This means that it is made up of lots of different pieces all of which contribute to an employee’s perception of what the culture is. Whilst culture is something that is intangible in nature, there are clues that you can pick up when trying to identify what it is. Foremost amongst these is what people pay attention to and view as important. An organisation whose leaders stress the importance of the staff, will often have that culture embedded in policies, procedures and even the physical buildings (so for example a well-equipped staffroom or even a gym might be present), whilst one where leaders are focused on conformity and ensuring efficiency, is likely to be structured in a different way with narrower spans of control and a more regimented approach to work. It’s important to stress that as culture is a construct, it can change; but for that to happen one of two things must occur. Either a recognition needs to take place that the people in the organisation want to change

(this is the transformative change that Mezirow (1991) stressed was possible) or the people leading the organisation change.

As with many aspects of leadership, typologies are used to identify the many different forms of culture that might be present in an organisation. Often these are split into controlling, collaborative, cultivating and competence-based approaches. It is not our intention to look at every possible type of culture, instead we will look at a few common forms found within education and see what challenges these would cause for Mariam

Cameron and Quinn (1999) suggested four different forms of culture, each of which can be found within education, and each will have a differing outcome to Mariam's dilemma. The first approach, that they called a 'Clan' approach, stresses teamwork and collegiality of approach and, as the name suggests, sees the School as a family as much as a workplace. The leader's role is that of either a benevolent matriarch or patriarch whose role is to offer guidance. In many ways this culture seems appealing, but when applied to Mariam's situation, there are risks involved. Whilst the news might well be accepted when coming from the leadership figure, any restructure could (potentially) be viewed as something which could mean a reframing of the clan, something which might well be viewed as traumatic. In addition, a delegated communication plan might well be seen as reducing the power of the authority figure.

The second culture, a 'Hierarchy' approach (Cameron and Quinn, 1999) focuses on procedures within an organisation. The advantage for Mariam in this approach, is that lines of communication are likely to be already clearly formed and hence passing the message to everyone is relatively straightforward. However, given the fact that success in this culture is measured in the smooth running of the organisation, anything that is likely to challenge this could be seen as destabilising.

A 'Market' culture, one which is results-oriented, has become increasingly common within education. Coffield and Williamson (2011) describe the way in which much of compulsory education has become an exam factory, and this, together with the increased datafication of education (Stevenson, 2017), has meant that the end result has become increasingly important to the culture of many places. Given employees are seen as cogs within a bigger machine in this culture, a restructuring is potentially something that could be viewed as a realignment of roles, something that could help Mariam when explaining the situation. However, there is a very real danger that employees might feel undervalued.

The final culture identified by Cameron and Quinn (1999) is 'Adhocracy' where an entrepreneurial approach is encouraged. This can have great benefits in terms of empowering people to pursue ideas that they believe are beneficial, but from Mariam's perspective there are numerous problems that it might raise. The disparate nature of this culture means that communication can be challenging with the engrained independence that the culture engenders. meaning that communication needs to be less hierarchical in nature and more driven by negotiation. This can be time consuming.

The four cultures described above all have strengths and weaknesses, but there is one culture that can create multiple problems and one that needs to be avoided at all times: the toxic culture which can often come from poor leadership. Let's return to Mariam; when we left her, she was working in a supportive, collaborative environment where she and her department were allowed to work as team. They all had similar commitment levels to work, which is why it works, and there was always a sense of belonging in Mariam's team. Things, however, can change:

Six months on from her original dilemma and Mariam has begun to dread logging on to her emails. During the restructure, a new boss was appointed, and she quickly realised that they were very different from the outgoing one. From the start, Mariam and her team started seeing changes being imposed upon them, with a lot more structure and control coming down the hierarchy. In addition, work seemed to encroach far more into her life. Her old boss had a policy of never emailing at the weekend and insisting that when Mariam was on annual leave that cover should be provided so she could have a complete break, but her new boss had the expectation that everything should be actioned immediately, plans were changed at the last minute and Mariam had become used to phone calls in the evening asking her to sort something out for the next day. Mariam resented this approach and had caught herself snapping at some of her employees recently, not because of anything they had done, more borne out of frustration about the culture that had become embedded very quickly since the appointment of her new boss.

Culture from the top

Mariam's experience is a classic example of how culture starts at the top of the organisation and trickles down the structures. To many researchers, so much of what we do is down to learnt behaviour, and this is done through observation, imitation, and modelling (Bandura

1977). The theory suggests that if Mariam's boss starts behaving in a particular way, the likelihood is that everyone beneath them will do the same. Remember, our definition of culture came from Bower (2003) and if culture is 'the way we do things', then it is normal for people to look to leaders for clues about how to behave.

Culture is passed down, not just through the observation of what is important that employees undertake, but also through the recruitment of new members of staff. Leaders can stress characteristics that they view as important in job advertisements and then recruit 'in their own image' (Lumpkin, 2007). This will extend to any induction period that a new employee has. Using Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development as a model (Vygotsky, 1978), we can see that people are looking for a guide through any uncertainty and it is upwards that they tend to look. This means that the culture reinforced by educational leaders tends to become established as the norm, as those around a leader seek to conform and ensure complementary communication (Berne, 1958). In practice, what this means is that if the leader adopts a (say) Clan cultural approach, then the strong likelihood is that this will permeate through each level as employees learn what is important and try to avoid crossed communications where people are looking to get different things out of the conversation, a situation that often leads to conflict.

At this point it is important to reiterate the heterogenic nature of educational workforces. We have mentioned how situational leadership is often used to ensure that the needs of each individual are met. Whilst this sounds like a sensible approach and embraces the diversity inherent in education, the practical realities can be problematic. We return to Mariam for one last time.

Mariam looked at the request from the Recent Graduate and her brain began to whirl. The request was to leave early on Friday to visit an elderly relative who had recently been hospitalised. The email outlined the extra work that they had undertaken to make sure that everything was finished in time for the weekend, and also the details of the cover they had arranged to ensure the one class they taught during this period was covered. The tone of the email was professional and there was no doubting at all in Mariam's mind that this was a request that she was happy to approve.

Half an hour later her heart sank as an email from the Procrastinator pinged into her inbox. The three-line request noted that they would not be in on Friday afternoon as

they had a few things to attend to. The last line pointed out that, as she had approved Recent Graduate's request, they were sure that they would do the same to theirs.

Mariam checked her work folder; the Procrastinator still hadn't provided details of their module evaluations and checking their timetable she found that they were teaching all Friday afternoon. Sighing, she replied, turning down the request.

Five minutes later there was a knock on her door and in walked the angry Procrastinator.

This case study highlights the difficulties associated with being a leader. If we take the personalities out of the request then the two emails are asking for exactly the same thing and hence should be treated as such. However, when the extra information is included then it is likely that most people would treat the two emails differently.

However, it is not just about the personalities that are included when deciding on a course of action; instead, the environment the leader works within needs to be taken into account. These could include the contract that employees sign; some are very detailed in terms of what is acceptable time off and what isn't; others are rather more vague. The culture is also an important factor: Mariam is likely to be influenced by the approach taken by her boss and also by the degree of autonomy of decision-making she has.

Questions for discussion

How might this change in culture affect the staff and in particular their motivation to work? Would it affect their loyalty to the organisations? How would a change in culture relate to a situational leadership style?

Consider the changes a team will see if their work environment switches from one style of leadership to a more situational based approach.

Fairness and equity through situational leadership

Fairness has been mentioned already in this chapter in terms of situational leadership but as with so much of leadership theory, there is no simple consensus on what is actually meant by fairness. Earlier in the chapter we have referred to the situational leadership style as best placed to align with the different type of employers within the school. However, at this point

in your learning you may want to think about how you would promote equity in the workplace using this approach.

Before we move on any further, let's consider the terminology in this area. 'Fairness' can often be akin to two separate terms equity and equality. It is important to understand the difference as we have so often heard them used intermittently yet they mean something quite different.

'Equality', which is often characterised by the word 'sameness', means that all staff will be treated the same, have the same resources, and same opportunities. This creates a great deal of consistency but does mean that individual needs and requirements can be ignored. The Equality and Human Rights Commission UK website has a range of useful recourses and guidance on the impact The Equality Act (2010) in schools and universities. A key point is that not everyone has the same needs and wants; hence, providing the same thing to everyone does not always create a situation where every employee can thrive equally.

The second term used is 'equity' which tends to be referred to as 'fairness'. This approach recognises that all people are different and as such require different resources, different consideration in order to make things fair. It is this term that is of most important to educational leaders as it is important that, as leaders, there is an understanding of the terms and how practice within the school can be aligned to ensure 'fairness' 'for all staff.

The importance of remembering that your workforce is heterogenic in nature is key and that every employee has their own specific needs and wants, but it is also vital to realise that there are specific groups that specifically can feel they are being treated unfairly. These might include minority ethnic groups, persons with disabilities, LBGTQ+ employees and those from a Roma background. The Fundamental Rights Report (2018) suggest that there is still a long way to go in ensuring fairness for all groups in the workplace, but by focusing on equity rather than equality, we can help all employees feel valued and that they have the resources needed to contribute to the workplace.

Many leaders in the sector adopt a transformational style to challenge the existing approaches to ensure ways are found to promote fairness for all staff. It is not enough to provide all staff with the same opportunities. The benefit of creating a fair workplace includes staff feeling safe, and very often will increase the employee's loyalty and investment into the workplace, resulting in less sickness and reduced turnover.

Returning to Mariam’s original dilemma of having to relay an important message to all staff within 24 hours, when some were on fractional contracts, some had childcare commitment, were on annual leave or unwell. Sending one email to all staff, or holding a staff meeting with staff in work that day, as we have already deliberated, would not reach all staff in the time period needed, but it would meet the need for equality or ‘sameness’ as everyone as it would be seen that every member of staff has had the same opportunity to hear the news. Ensuring equity or ‘fairness’, however, would require a rather different approach as we can see when we look at those staff with childcare responsibilities.

It is widely thought that women with children are treated unfairly and can be held back from promotions (GEO, 2019), making Mariam’s dilemma very real for this group of staff. If Mariam decided to hold a staff meeting, late afternoon with just the staff in work on that day, she could quite easily have missed several staff who have a flexible approach to their work to allow them to collect their children from school. For equity to be achieved, Mariam would need to consider how she reaches those staff with childcare commitments and not in work in order to keep things fair. In addition to this, the new head of department’s insistence on staff replying to emails and actioning things whilst on annual leave or outside of the working day clearly is not going to sit well with staff who have family commitment and enjoy their leisure time outside work. Very quickly inequality can creep into the workplace. Staff in a position to respond and action emails late can start to be favoured by the head of department.

To manage this it is important to have in place a clear expectation of answering things such as emails and texts. This is now important as ever with hybrid working.

Questions for discussion

Imagine that your School, currently the top recruiter in the UK for students, has recently seen a dip in applications and a drop in recruitment figures. The senior leaders within the organisation insist this needs to be reversed for the long-term survival of the organisation. What type of culture might be beneficial in this situation?

Conclusion.

Given all of the factors discussed in this chapter, what advice can we give leaders when dealing with the problems associated with running a large and diverse school? There is certainly no single ‘silver bullet’ that will solve all problems. However, a number of points can be put in place which can help its smooth running.

The first point is the importance of having a coherent and effective communication plan. Making sure that everyone hears and then decodes your messages correctly is of vital importance when trying to ensure that your plans are put into action. Of course, the fact that your messages are heard by everyone does not necessarily mean that they will agree (or indeed action) with everything, but it means that first hurdle is cleared and that you now have a chance of enacting your plans.

The second point is that you must remember that culture starts from the top. This means that what you stress as important and what you prioritise will be replicated in those you manage. The idea that you are a role model can be intimidating, but it needs to be remembered that your employees will not necessarily copy everything you do; instead they will see the bigger picture and aim to treat others in a similar way to how you treat your employees, and they will make sure that what you are focusing on, is replicated throughout the organisation.

Thirdly, ensuring that you focus on equity rather than a more general equality approach can have beneficial effects on the school. By treating individuals as exactly that – sentient beings in their own right, rather than merely part of a collective – you are able to meet individual needs and ensure everyone feels valued.

Finally, we return to our starting point: leading a large School requires an acceptance that everyone will have their own needs, agendas and characteristics. Some you will like, others maybe less so, but they are all vital to the successful running of the school and hence, to ensure maximum performance, you as a leader needs to look at the various components that make up a large and disparate School and draw them all together to work towards a common goal.

Summary points

- Any workforce is going to be heterogenic in nature
- Lines of communication need to be clear and decoding minimal
- The culture of the organisation generally comes from the senior leadership
- ‘Fairness’ and ‘equity’ do not mean you treat people in exactly the same way

Recommended reading

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