CONSTITUTING THE MANAGERIAL SUBJECT: AN INVESTIGATION INTO MIDDLE-MANAGEMENT IN FE

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Abstract

This doctoral study draws upon interviews with nine curriculum-based FE college middle-managers, and three college strategic plan documents, to critically analyse middle-management identity. Through the use of an analytical framework based on Foucault’s archaeological and genealogical ‘method’ the study shows that when middle-managers talk about their professional practice they are preoccupied with data-metrics. Consequently, they are recognised as ‘disciplined subjects’; disciplined by those data-metrics materially inscribed within the discursive regimes of their college strategic plan documents. The study additionally indicates that the more hierarchically senior the middle-manager the greater the intensity of focus upon data-metrics at the expense of institutional social relations, whereby their preoccupations with data-metrics yield de-socialising effects between themselves and key institutional participants such as teachers, learners and support staff. The study further suggests that while the middle-managers within this study were curriculum-based they were not curriculum-focused; findings which were consistent through the range of middle-management levels: senior-middle, lower-middle and middle-middle, and at separate college sites. Considered together these findings raise a number of important questions for the crucial role of curriculum-based middle-managers, particularly where middle-management as a function is recognised as the means by which policy implementation is secured yet where curriculum-based work, when understood as necessarily tied to pedagogic practices, requires a focus around ‘the learner’; a learner not ontologically foregrounded as data, but in authentically social terms.

- The University of Manchester
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- March 31, 2015
DECLARATION

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THE AUTHOR

Tony Fort received a Master of Inclusive Education degree from Bolton Institute of Higher Education in 1998, where he completed a research dissertation about educational disaffection and young people in post-compulsory education. He was awarded a PGCE in Post-compulsory Education from the University of Central Lancashire in 2008 where, as part of the programme, he carried out a classroom-based Action Research intervention which involved the reading of fiction as part of students’ tutorial provision. Tony’s first degree, BA (Hons) Computing in Business, was awarded in 1987 from Huddersfield Polytechnic.

‘I write in order to change myself and in order not to think the same thing as before.’
- Michel Foucault
Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

The focus of this research study is the Further Education middle-manager subject. By middle-manager I mean those who are formally appointed to roles within the FE college hierarchy: in the ‘middle’ between senior leaders, such as college chief executives and vice-principals, and the wider workforce of lecturers, trainers and assessors. The aim of the study is to gain an understanding of their working identity and associated practices within three General Further Education colleges in the north-west of England, by using Foucauldian tools of analysis, namely, archaeology and genealogy. The specific middle-manager focus is upon those managers whose scope of organisational responsibility is curriculum-based e.g. Construction, Social Care and ‘A’ level provisions, and who manage teaching staff. Foucault’s tools of analysis are appropriate for this study because they advance an understanding of the constituted subject; a subject constituted in and through discourse, as well as in and through practice. What the study gains from using such conceptual tools are a means of description, understanding and explanation that enables the interrelationship between agency and structure to be foregrounded and to be central to analysis.

The study seeks to address a number of questions. Firstly, how do Further Education middle-managers recognise and understand their particular subject-position? This question is concerned with how they speak about their daily work as middle-managers and the aspects they foreground when describing it. Secondly, what are the consequences of institutional policies on the working practices of the FE middle-manager subject (as well as how institutional policies exist in tension with government policies)? This question seeks to address how middle-management work is shaped by both institutional and wider government policies, potentially constraining and influencing their individual agency as middle-managers. Thirdly, what do middle-managers recognise as the prominent discourses that influence

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1 The use of the term ‘subject’ within the thesis refers to the Foucauldian subject i.e. the ways in which individuals are constituted as subjects as a consequence of knowledge (discursive practices) and action (material practices). This then informs their ‘identity’, not in terms of general categories of understanding such as age, gender, ethnicity and so forth, but as a middle-manager subject. Consequently, knowing whether a person is a man or a woman, as gendered for example, is not considered in constructing their identities. In this study identity is understood through discourse and practice; it is a middle-manager identity, not of a person in the widely understood sense.
their own subject-position, as well as those of others? This final question focuses on those discourses which, specifically through their practices, they recognise as influencing their work, the work of others with whom they interact, and to which knowledge (discourses) these practices are related.

The proposed research methodology is a case-study where the ‘case’ is the curriculum-based General Further Education College middle-manager (MM). I undertook in-depth interviews with nine middle-managers in three colleges in the North West of England, during 2012-2013. College strategic plan documents, current at the time of the interviews, were also collected. Data analyses were carried out using Foucauldian genealogical analysis for middle-manager interview data, with its specific focus on their espoused management practices, and archaeological analysis for college strategic plan documents, with its specific focus on discursive arrangements and the knowledge constituted about the college, as inscribed. My analyses subsequently consider how particular middle-management practices are tied to such knowledges.

This study is able to make a contribution to those gaps in existing knowledge by showing how, more than twenty years since Incorporation, which necessarily created the need for the existence of ‘the college middle-manager’, their work has evolved and developed since those key contributions made by writers in the field at that time (see, for example, Alexiadou 2001, Gleeson 2001, Gleeson and Shain 1999, Shain 2000). Specifically, this study contributes to knowledge about the working practices of the curriculum-based Further Education middle-manager in showing that while the middle-management layer can be understood as ‘thick’ (Coffield 2012) – with a span from senior to lower – middle-managers’ practices coalesce around data-metrics, whether they are senior middle-managers who manage multiple curriculum areas, or lower middle-managers who both manage and teach. The study also specifically shows that the intensity of middle-managers’ focus upon data-metrics renders social relationships between themselves and other institutional actors (for example, teachers and support staff) vulnerable, such that these relationships can be recognised as de-socialised. Moreover, by using a Foucauldian analytical framework I am able to add to the work of other researchers who have also used Foucault to inform their work within the field of Further Education e.g.
Kerfoot and Whitehead 2000, Leathwood 2000, O’Leary 2013, who draw on aspects of Foucauldian work to inform their studies about masculinity and management, gendered managerial discourses and graded lesson observations, respectively. However, in the specific consideration of Foucault, it is the application of his archaeological and genealogical ‘method’ that distinguishes my own work from such publications.

**Rationale for the research**

The reasons for this study arise out of my own professional context as a lecturer where I have more than 20 years’ experience in the FE sector and have led several courses; where middle-management might be the next stage in a ‘logical’ career development. However, I am interested in researching middle-management work from my current position as it is a role with which I regularly interact, and also informs my work as teacher-trainer in post-compulsory education. My study focuses on the college middle-manager because their work is largely neglected in educationally-related academic literatures. Writers tend to privilege prominent discourses that have become established within the English FE sector during the last twenty years, notably *performativity* and *managerialism*, yet there is scant analysis about how such discourses affect middle-managers’ work; specifically, their middle-management *practices*; as well as the ways they serve to shape middle-manager identity. Moreover, the emergence of ‘the middle-manager’ within the sector has coincided, necessarily, with the increasing prominence of these discourses. In the specific consideration of discourse, the study draws upon the Strategic Plans of

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2 Performativity is a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change - based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic). The performances (of individual subjects or organizations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of ‘quality’, or ‘moments’ of promotion or inspection. (Ball 2003, p.216)

3 Managerialism includes the extensive use of quantitative performance indicators (see Randle and Brady 1997); it is characterised by a shift in the locus of power from the knowledge of practising professionals to auditors, policy-makers and statisticians, none of whom need know anything about the profession in question (Davies 2003, p. 91).

4 Performativity and Managerialism are significant to the design of the study in providing the socio-historical and discursive conditions within which middle-managers (and others, e.g. teachers) carry out their work, and which influence their *working practices*; practices about which more knowledge is required.
those colleges where the middle-managers are employed, examining how their practices are traceable to, and influenced by, the discursive content of this key institutional policy document and, where writers note, middle-managers are understood to be implementers of college policy (Briggs 2005, Page 2011a).

At the beginning of *Middle-Management in FE*, Briggs (2006) asks about her own book, ‘Why is it needed?’ In providing a justification, she notes the wealth of literature available ‘by the shelf-load’ (p.1) at railway stations and airport bookstalls, offering advice on how to be a ‘highly-effective’ manager, yet none of it is provided about the FE middle-manager. Moreover, she asks ‘How many books do you even see with “further education” in the title?’ (p.1). Setting such questions in the context of an education sector which enrols in excess of four million students each year (Arnett 2013), her assessment of such a void of published material appears noteworthy. More pointedly, Briggs (2005) writes:

> There is little empirically based understanding of the roles of middle managers in English further education colleges, yet these managers occupy a pivotal role within a complex setting (p.27) [Emphases added]

McTavish (2006), citing other FE research (Gleeson and Shain 1999; Gleeson 2001; Leader 2004), further observes:

> … [i]t has been shown that middle managers in colleges play a significant role, sometimes under-appreciated, in mediating between professional, managerial and college-wide interests (p.414) [Emphases added]

More recently, Page (2010b) observes that despite calls over the last 20 years, by writers such as McNay (1988) and Lumby (1997), for greater attention to those positions occupying the mid-tier of FE college structures, this level remains ‘under-researched and under-theorised’ (Page 2010b, p.2).

In making a contribution to the gaps in knowledge, identified by those writers above, it is through my role and work as a lecturer in the context of the English FE College, and my knowledge of the FE sector, that I am afforded the opportunity to undertake empirical and conceptual work about the FE middle-manager. Through my research on the professional doctorate where I initially explored the professional identity of the FE pedagogue (lecturer, teacher, trainer, assessor) (see Fort 2010a,
2010b) it was those discourses of performativity and managerialism that featured prominently in the reading for, and writing of, these research papers. Consequently, I became aware that these discourses not only impinge upon the work of the pedagogue, but on the very managers who are implicated in the enactment of ‘managerialism’, who are subject to the demands of performativity, like teaching staff, yet where more knowledge about their work is needed. It is these factors that influenced the design and implementation of my research study. Moreover, it illuminates the importance of a Doctorate of Education as a site for professionals to investigate their practice; *inter alia*, affording sufficient time to research aspects of professional practice prior to the design of an actual thesis, through rigorous scholarly preliminary work and supervisory support and feedback.

A further rationale for the study is located in the contribution I have been making through my role, and practice, as a college lecturer in the Further Education sector, which involves regular interaction with middle-managers about curriculum-related matters, e.g. agreeing programme delivery arrangements in the form of timetabled hours for study programmes at Level Three and Entry Level, whilst striving to ensure curriculum provision is suitable for learner cohorts. Through researching their work, and being cognizant of related FE, and wider educational literatures, I am better placed, professionally to carry out this work. Moreover, this research serves to develop me for the purposes of my teacher-training work, where I support both in-service and pre-service trainee post-compulsory teachers and where I also teach on degree programmes; developing me academically as a ‘researching professional’. It is through my current role, and as a consequence of 22 years of teaching and working in FE, and more recently teacher-training and Higher Education, combined with the knowledge I have gained through my labours as a professional doctorate student, that I further intend to make a contribution to important gaps in knowledge as cited by those writers above.

**Structure of the thesis**

The first three chapters provide the background and context for the curriculum-based Further Education Middle-manager, when considering their work and identity.
Chapter Two considers recent FE reforms framed within a wider neo-liberal context, as well as the implications of education policy for FE middle-managers, while Chapter Three examines the published literatures about their work and how these inform understandings of middle-management identity. Chapter Four explains the study’s research methods and methodology: the data collection methods, sampling strategies and data analyses I deployed, pertinent ethical considerations, the validity and reliability of the study, as well as the conceptualization of my study by thinking with Foucauldian archaeology and genealogy. Chapters Five, Six and Seven are distinct chapters about the three middle-manager cases at each of the three FE colleges, middle-middle, lower-middle and senior-middle, at East College, Central College and West College, respectively. In each of these three chapters an archaeological analysis of each college’s strategic plan document and a genealogical analysis of the three middle-managers’ interview data are carried out, followed by a discussion of these analyses that traces their articulated practices to their respective college strategic plan documents. Chapter Eight contains a meta-analysis based on the totality of data generated by the study and which is largely informed by those data, and their analyses, contained within Chapters Five, Six and Seven. Finally, Chapter Nine concludes the thesis by considering its contributions to knowledge, its implications for policy and practice, and possibilities for further research.
Chapter Two
Further Education - Understanding the Context

Introduction

In order to further contextualise the work of the curriculum-based FE college middle-manager this chapter considers the development of what has come to be recognised as ‘the FE sector’ and how, more recently, it has become increasingly business-like in a context characterised by competition. It acknowledges that under the current Coalition government, the sector has been re-classified to the private sector, corroborating Ball and Junemann (2012) who note the ways in which the educational landscape continues to be transformed and where neoliberalism is pervasive (Ball 2012). It then considers the purpose education policy plays within Further Education, recognising ‘policy’ as a form of knowledge-production (Gunter 2012), and its significance for middle-managers’ work.

The FE Sector – historical development

In the consideration of what, ontologically, can plausibly be rendered ‘the Further Education sector’, from the establishment of technical colleges in the nineteenth century, followed by Incorporation as a consequence of the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act, to the period of post-Incorporation more recently, Lucas (2004) notes that its ‘haphazard development … has left FE in an ambiguous position’ (p.39) [Emphasis added]. He continues:

FE colleges are perhaps best understood not as institutions with a clear identity, but as a number of segments existing in a disparate relationship to each other … It is this legacy of diversity and lack of a clear strategic mission that distinguishes the FE sector so clearly from schools and universities. (p.39)

Emphasising the sector’s diversity and disparity, Ainley and Bailey (1997) write:

‘within the FE sector as a whole there [are] “more than a hundred mini-sectors”’

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5 Incorporation – The incorporation of FE colleges was a result of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 which removed FE and Sixth-form colleges from local authority control. For the first time in their history FE colleges were funded through the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), becoming independent self-governing corporations responsible for their own staff, budgets, assets, course planning and marketing. This significant event for the FE sector occurred during the Conservative government’s third term of office whereby they sought to ‘undermine the power and influence of LEAs. This aim was underpinned by the belief that the introduction of markets and competition would improve provision.’ (Lucas 2004, p.27)
(Scott 1996, cited in Ainley and Bailey 1997, p.8); the existence of such ‘mini-sectors’ being consistent with the disparity inherent in the ‘haphazard development’ recognised by Lucas (2004), and which emerged following the formative decades of the 1970s and 1980s where, across England and Wales, individual FE institutions received different degrees of political support as well as varying levels of local authority funding. Continuing in this vein, more recently, the *Times Education Supplement* reports that as FE colleges have had their funding entitlements reduced to what the Association of Colleges⁶ describe as ‘bones levels’ they could ‘be forced to become “bidding machines” as they try to secure additional pockets of cash to stay afloat’ (*TES* 2012a, p.51). However, as its history testifies, such a predicament is not inconsistent with the contingent nature of funding for FE provision. As Ainley and Bailey (1997) observe, persistent government neglect over the course of the sector’s history has generally meant that colleges have had to ‘take their own route and devise their own futures’ (p.11), writing:

‘...[c]olleges have always had to attract business in the form of students to their courses and programmes ... they have always to some extent had to operate in a competitive market’. (p.11)

They continue: ‘private enterprise and market forces in FE are not a new phenomenon’ (Gleeson 1996, cited in Ainley and Bailey 1997, p.11), while the following situation demonstrates how entrepreneurially sophisticated, more recently, some individual colleges have become. Under the headline: ‘A-level no-fail guarantee may double to £10,000’, the *TES* (2012b) reports:

Blackburn College is considering doubling its unique no-fail guarantee for A-level students to £10,000, as it made it through its first year of results with no payouts ... The show of confidence increased interest ... and as a result it is attracting students who previously left Blackburn for sixth forms in neighbouring towns ... Blackburn’s guarantee is perhaps the ultimate expression of colleges’ drive to improve success rates, which began in the 1990s when government incentivised them to reduce high drop-out rates. (p.50) [Emphases added]

Informatively, the article not only indicates the types of savvy tactics deployed in attempts to capture students, it alludes to government policy incentives whereby college leaders and managers are obliged to become intimately acquainted with

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⁶ The Association of Colleges was established in 1996 as a voice for FE at national and regional level. (Please see [http://www.aoc.co.uk](http://www.aoc.co.uk), Accessed October 26, 2014)
funding entitlements which, in part, are dependent on students’ final achievement rates that impact on learner cohort success rates, and how these funding entitlements, as well as other sources of revenue, can be used to facilitate innovative marketing tactics as reported. The same article records that the principal of the college faced criticism for potentially ‘rewarding failure’ while the scheme was also considered to be ‘a cavalier use of taxpayers’ money’ (TES 2012b, p.51). However, as the TES reports, the college did not have to pay-out to any student as it ensured that the eligibility criteria were sufficiently ‘tight’. Yet, though it demonstrates the sophisticated interplay between funding incentives and market competition for students, it further emphasises the consumerist landscape of the FE sector, as sources of revenue are sought via student enrolments, and where learning provision is aggressively marketed via cash-back incentives more usually associated with the consumption of retail products and services. As Bathmaker and Avis (2012) observe:

Whereas the UK’s Association of Colleges described colleges in 2010 as responsive to the needs of individuals, business and communities, they might also be defined as businesses (p.3) [Emphases added]

Crucially, they note that the ‘importance of viability’ in terms of organisational survival, as a primary institutional concern, is additionally reflected in the contractual conditions of employment where the notion of a ‘flexible firm’ model (Lucas and Unwin 2009) is common-place across the FE sector. Consequently, employment is insecure. However, while Bathmaker and Avis (2012) focus upon the insecurity of teachers’ employment similar insecurity exists for middle-managers, potentially yet more vulnerable, due to their susceptibility to frequent institutional restructuring exercises (Gleeson 2001, Page 2011b, Shain 2000).

To summarise, in a sector characterised as disparate and where employment is insecure, where college leaders and managers are required, and appear to be, increasingly astute in the securing of funds (and reputations) it will be interesting to assess how, or whether, these factors are discernible through data collected in my own research study; for example, how, and if, the securing of funding and the ‘drive to improve success rates’ (TES 2012b, p.50) is manifested in the working practices of the middle-manager, and the degree to which they are evident. Indeed, in the drive
for colleges to improve their individual success rates as a consequence of
government policy, Newman (2001), in the context of schools and hospitals, notes
the effect of government targets and performance indicators, under the New Labour
administration which, without requiring ‘hands-on’ direct intervention, served as a
strategy to focus professional effort and managerial activity. Observing that a pre-
occupation with those factors that are likely to be the subject of external scrutiny
has the potential to yield ‘perverse effects’ (p.93), and that external scrutiny may
‘lead organisations to focus their energies on the production of discourses of success
... to ensure survival in a competitive environment’ (p.93), ‘dull conformity’ (p.93)
occurs, as well as ‘organisational isomorphism’ (p.94), whereby the diversity of
practice within a particular sector is squeezed out. With its focus on particular
targets and indicators of success; what I refer to throughout this thesis as data-
metrics; it will be useful to ascertain whether there are parallels in my own study
with Newman (2001), in her monograph about the New Labour government’s
attempts to modernise the public sector ‘in the aftermath of two decades of neo-
liberal reforms’ (p.vii), whereby they not so much abandoned neo-liberal policy, but
tempered its fundamental tenet of market individualism through the notion of a
‘reinstall[-ation]’ and ‘renewal of civil society’ (p.170) in the form of ‘the Third Way’
(p.1).

During the time-period of this doctoral study, whereby my data collection occurred
between August 2012 and May 2013, the main funding bodies overseeing the
funding of individual colleges within the FE sector were the Skills Funding Agency
(SFA) and the Education Funding Agency (EFA). The SFA through its budget of £4
billion⁷, funds skills training for FE in England, supporting more than 1000 colleges,
private training organisations, and employers; the SFA is an executive agency⁸,
sponsored by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). The EFA

⁷ Budgetary allocations accurate as at May 2015.
⁸ Executive agencies enable executive functions within government to be carried out by a well-
defined business unit with a remit for a specific focus on delivering specified outputs, within a
framework of accountability to Ministers. By the mid-1990s this model had become the principal
organisational type for public service delivery. See ‘Executive Agencies: A guide for departments,
Cabinet Office:
cies_guidance_oct06_0.pdf, Access date: May 25, 2015)

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manage £54 billion\(^9\) of funding per year in order to support all state-provided education for eight million children aged three to 16, and 1.6 million young people aged 16 to 19. Like the SFA, the EFA is also an executive agency but sponsored by the Department for Education instead.

**A reconstructed view of Further Education and its providers**

Notwithstanding the brevity of the above historical exposition, the intention is to not only provide a broad sketch to outline the historical development of the FE sector, but to contextualise it in regard to more recent developments. (Please also refer to Appendix T – Key Policy Reports, Events and Legislation in FE since 1991 to the present). In doing so it can be seen that it has become legitimate practice for colleges to market their services in ways not previously considered possible; for example, when FE colleges were overseen by Local Education Authorities prior to **Incorporation** (see Footnote 5, p.12 above). That marketing incentives such as ‘cash-back guarantees’ are institutional practices strongly suggests that post-16 learning provision, has been reimagined as a private commodity, resulting in a reconstructed view of FE; by the public as consumers and, equally, by those individuals employed by colleges, whether senior or middle-managers, or teachers.

A reconstructed view of FE and, critically, a reshaped understanding of its providers, can also be considered in light of the legislative changes made by the UK Coalition government: removing public sector controls over English FE colleges through the Education Act 2011; The Office for National Statistics observing: ‘English further education colleges and sixth form college corporations have been classified to the private sector with effect from 1 April 2012’ (ONS 2012, p.2) [Emphases added]. The same information is reported by *The Observer* under the headline ‘Sixth-form teachers now corporate drones’ recording: ‘That means almost 200,000 teachers no longer count as public employees’ (*The Observer* 2012, p.37).

In attempts to map the continued transformation of the FE sector, this very recent and significant legislative reform can be considered in light of Whitehead (2005) who observes historically-earlier and similar transformational ‘moves’ traceable from the late 1980s onwards:

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\(^9\) Budgetary allocations accurate as at May 2015.
Up to around 1992 a paternalistic model of management prevailed ... This restrictive and inhibiting work culture departed rapidly after incorporation of FE in April 1993. *From this point a much more entrepreneurial culture took hold across the sector* (Whitehead, 1996, 1999), with many principals (now chief executives) only too keen to exercise their ‘right to manage’ and build their empires. (p.16-17) [Emphases added]

It is this ‘entrepreneurial culture’ reflected in (business) practices and instances, such as cash-back guarantees, as evidenced above at Blackburn College more recently, which serves to demonstrate such continued transformations since *Incorporation*; an instance of yet another ‘small move’ in the shift towards private sector practices where colleges, and their staffs, as a result of the more recently enacted *Education Act 2011*, now reside firmly within the private sector. Such transformations reflect a working context that Jessop (2002) recognises as the ‘competition state’ which, Ball (2009) observes: ‘acts as a “commodifying agent” *rendering education into commodity* … “recalibrating institutions”’ in an attempt to make them homological with the firm’ (p.97). [Emphases added]

For a list of key dates that identify enacted legislation and policy reports that have served to shape and transform the FE sector, many of which have served to influence the increasing commodification of post-compulsory education, particularly since FE colleges were removed from local authority control, please refer to *Appendix T*.

The reimagining of post-16 education, *as a commodity* rather than a public good; delivered by institutions and employees who now reside in the private sector, rather than the public, have profound implications for how FE continues to be perceived. Emphasising the wider terrain within which colleges operate by also considering those training providers who compete for contracts with General FE colleges, following up on a news article which had previously reported a particular provider, *Elmfield Training*, as having taken more than a third of its public funding as profit and paying its owner a £3 million dividend (*TES* 2012c), the *TES* reports:
When Elmfield’s high level of profits was first revealed, the SFA\textsuperscript{10} said that for-profit private providers are entitled to use funding however they choose once they have met their contractual requirements. “As long as they deliver the services in accordance with the terms of the contract then they are entitled to make a profit and use it how they wish,” a spokeswoman said. (TES 2012c, p.49)

Consequently, when specifically considering all of those instances outlined above: from the deployment of particular institutional tactics in order to capture students in a highly competitive local ‘A-level’ market, to the use of public-funds for training purposes which generate substantial financial surpluses not subsequently subject to government mandate, as well as the reclassification of FE’s estimated 196,000 employees to the private sector (ONS 2012), Ball and Junemann’s (2012) notion of ‘a complex series of small moves and developments over time’ (p.21) [Original emphasis] is suggested, which they recognise as:

... a set of interrelated political processes embedded in the dynamics of modernisation – deconcentration, destatalisation, disarticulation, diversification, flexibilisation and centralisation. (p.21)

That is not to imply that these individual instances are directly related to each other, but that each ‘small move’ is reflective of an educational landscape which continues to be “‘transformed” and “modernised’”\textsuperscript{11} (Ball and Junemann 2012, p.20).

Within the processes of ‘modernisation’ and transformation of the public sector, the boundaries and spatial horizons and flows of influence and engagement around education are being stretched and reconfigured in a whole variety of ways. (Ball and Junemann 2012, p.25)

Significantly, such ‘modernisation’ and ‘transformation’ have particular relevance to my own research study as they continue to impact upon the working practices and identity of the FE MM. For instance, as the FE sector becomes more widely recognised as a private-sector provider, and where colleges are necessarily steered, as a consequence of government policy, towards more private sector engagement; increasingly reliant upon the acquisition of alternative revenues as opposed to funding secured through national budgets, there are implications for middle-management work, particularly where middle-management is recognised as

\textsuperscript{10} Skills Funding Agency, the Funding body which replaced the Learning and Skills Council in April 2010.

\textsuperscript{11} Such ‘modernisation’ is recognised by Ball and Junemann (2012) as having begun in the 1970s, was accelerated through the Thatcher era, pursued with equal vigour under New Labour and is being continued under the current Coalition government.
instrumental in the securing of institutional strategy (Briggs 2005, Gunter 2001, Page 2011a). Consequently, aspects of FE middle-manager work might be increasingly configured to be yet more business-focused, requiring more commercial and entrepreneurial acumen where, in more ‘liquid times’ (Bauman 2007), solidity is subordinated to fluidity, compliance subordinated to creativity. Moreover, in the particular consideration of ‘modernisation’, where management is conceived, specifically, as ‘innovative, externally oriented, dynamic and enterprising’ (Ball and Junemann 2012, p.21), when additionally accounting for Bauman’s metaphor of ‘liquid times’ that foregrounds ‘an era of rolling impermanence’ (Lee 2005, p.66) [Emphasis added], impacting upon national and local institutions and those who work within them, the how of neo-liberalism12 is brought into focus: ‘How it is “done”. How it “works”’ (Ball 2012, p.2); prompting considerations for the ‘how’ of middle-managers’ work and the scope for innovation and dynamism in the face of such modernisation and impermanence.

Moreover, this appears particularly apposite for curriculum-based middle-managers as education, and related pedagogic practices, are reconfigured in light of virtual learning, teaching and ‘the potentially transformative effects of MOOC technologies in the economics of mass teaching’ (Marginson 2013, p.365). Indeed, the potential growth of MOOC technologies for post-compulsory learning ensures student enrolments are both potentially limitless and geographically dispersed, prompting questions for the ontology of the curriculum middle-manager, their work ‘in the middle’, and how individual managers are able to respond to the uncertainties of a neo-liberal context.

**Further Education in a Neo-liberal context**

In using the above examples to illustrate the ways in which institutions within the FE sector are required, as a consequence of government policy, to exercise increasing autonomy, they can plausibly be considered in terms of:

...[t]he re-modelling of schools, colleges and universities, the instilling of new management capacities and the arts of performance management, and the insertion of narratives of enterprise. (Ball 2009, p.96)

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12 For the definition of neo-liberalism this study recognises, please see overleaf, p.20.
Such a ‘re-modelling’ of the educational spectrum, with its associated ‘narratives of enterprise’ and ‘new management capacities’, might more usefully be understood under the broader term of ‘neo-liberalism; which Apple (2004) recognises as an increasingly powerful and hegemonic discourse. However, the term ‘neo-liberalism’, as some writers caution, has become so widely used as to render it almost meaningless (Ball 2012, Clarke 2008). Consequently, in the interests of clarity, my understanding of neo-liberalism for the purposes of this thesis references Jessop (2002), who asserts:

Neoliberalism is concerned to promote a market-led transition towards the new economic and social regime. For the public sector, it involves privatization, liberalization and the imposition of commercial criteria in the residual state sector. For the private sector, it involves deregulation and a new legal and political framework to provide passive support for market solutions ... Innovation is expected to follow spontaneously from the liberation of the animal spirits of individual entrepreneurs as they take advantage of incentives in the new market-led climate and from the more general government promotion of an enterprise culture. (p.260)

Moreover, Jessop (2002a) observes that as a consequence of neo-liberalism ‘social policy is subordinated to economic policy’ (p.459) [Emphases added], a point similarly made by Avis (2002) who, noting the reconfiguration of educational and welfare systems under the New Labour government (1997-2010), and the concomitant empowering of those tasked with their management and regulation, suggests that resultantly:

...[t]he social formation becomes thoroughly economised. The economy and the pursuit of competitiveness becomes hegemonic – the whole of society needs to contribute to this goal. (p.79) [Emphases added]

Avis (2002) observes that in the establishment of the Learning and Skills Council, the central funding and regulatory body for FE\(^{13}\), the New Labour government of the day expressly demanded that it ‘deliver value for money’ (DfEE 2000, cited in Avis 2002, p.78); observing that ‘value for money’ was a distinctive consideration inscribed in many of New Labour’s government policy documents that prioritised economic over social concerns.

However, while Ball (2012) notes that neo-liberalism privileges economic concerns, he observes that it is, significantly, also about ‘minds’ (p.3), that neo-liberalism ‘is

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\(^{13}\) The Learning and Skills Council was established in April 2001 and replaced by the Skills Funding Agency in April 2010.
producing ... new kinds of social actors’ (p.145) [Emphases added] who are ‘spatially mobile, ethically malleable’ (p.145), and fluent in the languages of both public and private spheres. Like Fairclough (2000) who recognises neoliberalism as an increasingly international discourse, transcending geographical borders, Ball observes that many of these newly created types of social actor are ‘increasingly disconnected from national identities and loyalties’ (Ball 2010, cited in Ball 2012, p.145):

...these people, their relationships and interactions and morality and money and ideas and influence are transforming social, economic and political relations and enacting the neo-liberal imaginary in very real and practical ways in education and education policy. Neo-liberalism is insinuating itself into almost every aspect of contemporary social life’ (p.145).

To make reference to Ball’s ‘imaginary’ which alludes to the significance of the ‘minds’ of social actors, who are subsequently instrumental in the enactment of educational policy and practice, Lingard (2005) observes that as a consequence of neo-liberal hegemony, which results in the ‘drowning out [of] other meanings’ (p.168), learners have become ‘subjects of education’ rather than ‘co-producers of knowledge’ while, similarly, teachers have been reduced to ‘objects of policy’ (p.171) [Emphasis added]. According to Lingard (2005), this is significant not only in terms of formulating understandings of teachers’ pedagogic practices whereby, for instance, the global privileging of testing and assessment over epistemological concerns continues to grow (as evidenced in OECD and World Bank indicators) but, additionally, has implications for teachers’ identities, dispositions and the social relations of their work (Jeffrey and Woods 1998, cited in Lingard 2005, p.168). Similarly, Apple (2004) observes that, within neo-liberal educational regimes, an ‘academic achievement model’ dominates which renders educational knowledge unproblematic while simultaneously being subservient to the pursuit of ‘academic productivity’. Moreover, he notes that such an achievement model is ‘influenced more and more strongly by managerial concerns of technical control and efficiency’ (Apple 2004, p.29).

I propose that those observations and claims, made by those writers cited above, in their understandings of education, as recognised within a neo-liberal context, possess implications for the curriculum-based FE middle-manager, prompting
questions which, if addressed, will additionally serve those questions formulated about middle-managers I designated at the outset. Specifically, as curriculum management increasingly appears to privilege performative rather than epistemological concerns, in the form of ‘outcomes’ expressed as *data-metrics*, what are the effects on the social relations between curriculum middle-managers and those with whom they work (teachers, senior managers and students), and how are they manifested? In their social relations, and interactions, what aspects and concerns are privileged; using which rationales? Moreover, are these rationales traceable to education policy documents, in the form of strategic plan documents? Finally, how do particular truths come to be known, as a consequence of policy production and circulation?

**Further Education policy - production and purpose**

In this section I examine the role and purpose of educational policy within the field of FE; *who* is actually involved in policy production, and how policy might be understood when considering the identity and working practices of the FE middle-manager.

Ball (2008) writes: ‘Within policy, education is now regarded primarily from an economic point of view’ (p.11). Prior to any subsequent analysis of such a statement, it might be useful to initially ask: ‘What *is* policy?’ However, such a simple question is not easily answered. For example, Gunter (2012) observes that policies appear in some instances ‘to be based on beliefs transformed into assertions’ (p.38). While Ball (1993) asserts that policy can be considered as both ‘text’ and ‘discourse’, noting that ‘policies are also processes and outcomes’ (p.44) which yield ‘policy effects’ (p.50). However, Ball (1993) writes that ‘the “effects” of policy cannot be simply read-off from texts; they are the outcome of conflict and struggle between “interests” in context’ (p.47).

Fairclough (2000) notes there are very few ‘direct readers’ of official policy documents, observing that governments do not produce them to engage readers in dialogue: ‘The focus throughout is upon *telling people* about the Government’s *proposed solutions*’ (p.13) [Emphases added]. Similarly, Gunter recognises policy statements as a form of ‘knowledge production’ that determines a particular ‘game
in play’ (Gunter 2012, p.147); such knowledge pronouncements and assemblages of statements diminishing ‘the possibilities for thinking “otherwise”’ (Ball 1993, p.49); where ‘words are ordered and combined in particular ways and other combinations are displaced or excluded’ (Ball 1999, p.48). Like Gunter (2012), who observes the assertive qualities implicit in government policy statements, Fairclough (2000) notes that official documents are ‘reader-directive’ and while the liberal use of bullet-points ensures they are likely perceived as ‘reader-friendly’, they act as a device to marginalise dialogue still further.

Policy content aside, turning attention to the consideration of who actually formulates official government policy statements, Ball and Junemann (2012) recognise a ‘policy community’ who are strongly inter-linked through ‘policy networks’, a ‘form of governance that interweaves and interrelates markets and hierarchies’ (p.9). They recognise ‘policy networks’ as being metaphorically located in, and part of, ‘a messy hinterland’ (p.9) and that the ‘policy community’ exists in a network of relations whereby education policy discourses are reconfigured and disseminated. Gunter (2012) refers to something similar that she terms ‘clubness’, located in private interest networks following public sector reforms in the Thatcher era, and which subsequently benefitted the Blair government. She recognises these networks as being ‘embedded within government’ (Ball 2007 cited in Gunter 2012, p.61) and ‘informally through people knowing and vouching for each other’ (p.61); constituting ‘policy elites’ (p.61):

It seems as if governance in regard to education is about the ongoing positioning and integration of elites rather than a complete opening up of policy-making to networks (Gunter 2012, p.61).

To summarise, policy-making, as a form of ‘knowledge production’, is produced by elites who exist in a multiplicity of relations across the private-public sector divide that can be considered opaque. Ball and Junemann (2012) make this very point when considering the enrolment of business into the work of government policy and political projects:

Social, business, philanthropic and political relationships are intertwined and interlayered, and function in relation to one another. This means that what is important, what the limits of the network are and what the constituent relationships mean are hardly ever readily apparent or researchable. (Ball and Junemann 2012, p.79)
Where policy production is, generally, produced by elites, and which likely excludes those who engage in the ‘dirty job’ of middle-management (Shain 2000), considerations of policy are nevertheless crucial to my study as, through the use of Foucauldian archaeology and genealogy, I seek to establish the strength of relationship between college strategic plan documents, as a specific instance of policy, and middle-managers’ practices. Moreover, I seek to establish how middle-management practices can be traced to policy statements at a national level, for example, through discursive arrangements and configurations related to government funding, as well as performative-measurement and government regulation of college learning provisions.

**Education Policy in a Neo-liberal context – considering the FE Middle-Manager**

Attention is now paid to how those considerations above are useful when formulating the identity and working practices of the curriculum-based FE Middle-manager.

Firstly, in relation to education policy, Coffield (2012) notes that the middle-management layer in English FE colleges ‘acts as a buffer which protects tutors and students from the torrents of policy pouring over colleges from our over-centralised system’ (Coffield 2012, p.2). However, in making this statement it is not that middle-managers should necessarily be understood as scrutinizers of education policy in terms of Fairclough’s (2000) ‘direct readers’, but rather, I suggest, that they ought to be more readily understood as managers of the implications and consequences of government policy statements as well as, importantly, centrally-announced regulations, issued via government bodies such as the Education Funding Agency. For instance, considering the educational reforms enacted in the recent legislation of the Education Act 2011 it would be enough for a middle-manager to know that their college could now become a wholly private enterprise and, consequently, that they would be expected to manage the implications of this; managing the impact upon departmental staff, for example, in both predictable and unforeseen ways.

Moreover, in adhering to Education Funding Agency (EFA) funding maxims and the ever-present institutional objective of viability, middle-management, as a protective ‘buffer’ can be understood as a necessary nodal point for the interpretation and
management of *the implications of financial regulations* immediately prior to operationalization: from balancing the full-time to part-time teacher ratio, to the calculation of minimum learner class-sizes for curricula to be delivered cost-effectively, to the monitoring and accounting of teachers’ hours in the classroom, while additionally ensuring that learning environments are sufficiently equipped to meet ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’ provision as stipulated by OfSTED’s Common Inspection Framework (OfSTED 2012).

Still further, they might also be expected to ensure curriculum-based learners are provided with opportunities for representation and are duly consulted in relation to ‘learner involvement strategies’ as demanded by government directives for self-evaluation and inspection purposes (DfES 2006). Hence, such middle-management *protection* of both tutors and students, as understood by Coffield (2012), might usefully be considered in terms of Gleeson and Shain’s (1999) notion of middle-managers as ‘mediators of change’, who construct ‘the art of the possible … in ways which are acceptable’ (p.470). However, in suggesting that middle-managers are unlikely to be avid direct readers of government policy, their identity might be more usefully foregrounded, instead, as *agents* in the operationalization of policy key *messages*, particularly in terms of *performative outcomes* and *regulatory requirements*. Moreover, and perhaps as an ideal notion, they can be considered to *steer* and be *steerers of policy*, operationally, while allowing teachers to teach and learners to learn.\(^{14}\) However, the ‘thick’ or ‘thin-ness’ of such policy, its particular dilution, by the time it reaches middle-management, in terms of understanding and ownership, is likely to be highly institutionally-specific, accounting for hierarchical structure, the particular middle-management level occupied and specific policy scope.

Secondly, accounting for middle-managers’ *distance from* policy formulation by recognising that policies are produced by elites (Gunter 2012) and are constructed in ways that intentionally marginalise dialogue (Fairclough 2000), when additionally considering Coffield’s statement regarding ‘torrents of policy’ which emanate from an ‘over-centralised system’ (Coffield 2012, p.2), suggesting both their volume and

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\(^{14}\) Notwithstanding the fact that some managers span the manager-teacher ‘divide’ in terms of hybridity.
forcefulness, it is apparent that middle-managers have a particular paradoxical relationship to policy. It is worth adding that government policy in post-compulsory education changes rapidly (Briggs 2005). Thus, paradoxically, middle-managers are remote from policy production yet, fundamentally, they are required to possess highly-developed sensibilities towards policy requirements and demands in their operational steering of them; requirements and demands which frequently change. In these understandings about middle-manager identity, Ball’s (2008) understanding of ‘the manager’ within education, generally, as a ‘cipher for policy’ (p.43) [Emphasis added] appears particularly suitable.

Finally, in foregrounding the diversity of the post-compulsory sector, which is understood to have been a consistent feature in its haphazard development from nineteenth century beginnings to the present day (Ainley and Bailey 1997, Lucas 2004), as well as paying attention to the increasing hegemonic status of neoliberalism (Apple 2002, Lingard 2005) that, necessarily, demands innovation, entrepreneurialism and enterprise (Jessop 2002); combining these two factors together, strongly suggests the continuation and even the growth of sector diversity, as well as an increase in the disparate relations between institutional providers; even more so, when accounting for the future consequences of the recent Education Act 2011. Consequently, for those individuals who occupy the middle hierarchy of these providers: remote from policy production yet tightly-tied to policy decrees and their enactment, some important implications are apparent for their working identities and practices. Again, yet more so, when considering the insecure nature of the sector’s employment conditions and the widespread adoption of the flexible firm model common across English FE colleges (Bathmaker and Avis 2012). As Gillies (2011) observes:

> Just as neoliberal governance shifts more from society and community to the individual, so ‘agile’ workers become more responsible for their own fates ... flexibility and operational authority are increased in return for results-based accountability. Success in the market is down to the agility of each worker: the company depends on worker agility and, as the worker depends on the company for employment, the worker takes on responsibility, therefore for her or his own economic fate. Insecurity is embodied and any sense of stable employment relies paradoxically on change and the capacity for rapid change' (Gillies 2011, p.213) [Emphases added]
Such neoliberal governance (Miller and Rose 2008), characterised by ‘agility’, appears particularly apposite in attempts to formulate both current and future understandings of curriculum-based FE college middle-managers and their context.

**Summary**

In considering how the preceding chapter is helpful to my own research study it indicates the changing context of the education landscape and its implications for the curriculum-based FE middle-manager, suggesting that attention should be paid to how this might be reflected in their work; for example, the responses of individual colleges within particular localised contexts as well as transformations and policy changes at a national level; in addition to how their work is transformed as a consequence of ‘global’ opportunities, and made possible at the global-local nexus, through ‘glocalisation’ (Robertson 1995, cited in Ball 2008, p.30). Moreover, it foregrounds considerations about the degree to which college strategic plans influence middle-manager identity and working practices, considerations which extend to their operationalization of policy key messages in the pursuit of the managerial bottom-line (Shain 2000); a bottom-line often expressed as measurable outcomes, in the form of *data-metrics*. Finally, given those observations that recognise a neo-liberal context that demands innovation, entrepreneurialism and enterprise (Jessop 2002) it prompts questions about the pace of policy production; whether, in these liquid times (Bauman 2007), the strategic plan, as a specific instance of college policy, is ever sufficiently accomplished.

The next chapter examines key published literatures about the FE college middle-manager and how these literatures inform understandings about the crucial work they carry out within an education sector that, as this chapter makes clear, continues to be transformed by neo-liberalism and public sector reforms.
Chapter Three

The FE Middle-manager - Reviewing the Literature

Introduction

In this chapter I provide a review of the literatures relevant to the FE Middle-Manager, drawing on relevant publications since Incorporation, the landmark FE event borne out of the consequences of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. The review begins by indicating the difficulties of formulating middle-manager identity in terms of homogeneity, an improbable identity in light of the different range and sizes of colleges and the associated need for different scales of middle-management structures. Moreover, in constructing their identity, key writers note that in many instances their work involves pedagogic labour (Gleeson and Shain 1999, Page 2011a). In the production and development of the literature review, primarily, it attends to three key researchers who have produced bodies of knowledge about the work of the FE middle-manager: Ann Briggs, Denis Gleeson (with others) and, more recently Damien Page; presenting their publications in turn and, in light of Gunter et al. (2013), facilitates consideration of the knowledge produced by them as illuminative of a particular position and positioning within the field of FE middle-management. In reviewing each of their publications, informative contributions by others are also considered and incorporated in their presentation, corroborating aspects and indicating variances within each of their works (e.g. Alexiadou 2001; Gunter 2001; Prichard 2000; Shain 2000).

Formulating FE Middle-manager identity through the literatures

It is important to state at the outset that the following literature review does not present the idea of an essentialised notion of an FE middle-manager occupying some ideal organisational middle position. FE middle-managers do not constitute a homogenous group (Gleeson and Knights 2008; Gleeson and Shain 1999) and the individual college structures in which they are located are as diverse as the FE sector itself (Briggs 2005, 2006). A case in point is provided in the more recent works of Page (2010a, 2010b, 2011a, 2011b) which focuses on management-type work directly connected to curriculum delivery where individuals occupying such positions are located in the space in-between those managers at a higher organisational level and the front-line work of teaching staff; they are individuals who both teach and...
manage. Page’s (2010b, 2011a) research draws on what he terms FTM\textsuperscript{s} (first-tier managers) who, while providing a critical linkage between the top and bottom of institutional structures are, themselves, largely situated beneath those middle-management positions such as Heads of Department and Curriculum Area Managers. Consequently, such FTMs are engaged in what can justifiably be considered as middle-management type work but they are not exclusively middle-managers, nor wholly teachers. By way of contrast, Gleeson and Shain (1999) in their study of middle-managers do not use the term - ‘FTM’ - preferring the referent - ‘middle’ - throughout their publication, yet they evidently include individuals who occupy similar, if not identical, institutional positions to those described by Page:

Promoted from the ranks, many ‘middle’ managers \textit{retain often heavy teaching commitments} and, at the same time, are expected to ‘hold the line’ between lecturers and senior managers in brokering change. (Gleeson and Shain 1999, p.469-470) [Emphases added]

Such liminal positions are those which Coffield (2012) would likely recognise as constituting part of the ‘thick layer’ (p.2) of FE middle-management which, he claims, characterises today’s English college structures. However, while not exclusively ‘middle-managers’ in that their work includes significant amounts of pedagogic labour, their inclusion within the literature review is necessary to adequately explain and authentically flesh-out ‘the middle-manager’, where Page (2011) notes, about those occupying the mid-tier of FE college structures, there is a dearth of published theory and research. Additionally, such publications make important contributions to the body of literatures about FE which, well over a decade ago, according to Alexiadiou (2001), remained ‘far from prolific’ (p.413).

Directly contrasting and comparing the work of Briggs (2005, 2006) with Page’s publications (2010a, 2011a, 2011b), while they differ in terms of the particular position of middle-managers (MMs) and their specific location within the middle-level tier, there are other noteworthy distinctions. For instance Briggs’s research into MMs includes managers of services to students (e.g. learning support services) and wider cross-college functions (e.g. Estates), in addition to curriculum-based MMs, whereas Page’s FTM research (like the work of Gleeson and Shain 1999) is exclusively curriculum focused. Furthermore, while Briggs seeks to make clear the work of the FE college MM in order to better understand their particular
organisational role and function, Page (2011b) focuses on differing forms of resistance adopted by FTMs as a consequence of the day-to-day financial and performative pressures which pervade the FE sector, exploring how individuals understand and work through the implications of such pressures; for example, mediating tensions between their identities as ‘teacher-manager’ as set against ‘manager’ when working with teaching staff. Thus, whereas Page (2011b) foregrounds pragmatic approaches to, and micropolitical aspects of, middle-management work, Brigg’s analyses are more generic and, by comparison, somewhat decontextualized. Indeed, Brigg’s perspective echoes the way knowledge has been typically produced around middle-management work in the school sector, as noted by Gunter (2001):

…[w]hile our knowledge of middle-management has grown rapidly, the particular gaze has been more on role and function and less about knowledge power structures. (p.107)

In seeking to provide explanations for the improbability of the emergence of an essentialised notion of a ‘middle-manager’ typically found in English FE colleges, writers such as Alexiadou (2001, 1999) recognise that, following Incorporation, ‘management’, as a generally understood term, emerged as the critical linkage between the new market conditions of FE colleges and the changing position of teaching professionals, noting that revised organisational structures were needed in order to respond to the nascent pressures of ‘the quasi-market’ (Lucas and Mace, 1999), demanding not only the development of institutional sensibilities towards notions of ‘the customer/consumer’ but knowledge and management practices linked to radical changes in funding regimes. Consequently, given the variability in the range and size of English General FE colleges, each with existing portfolios of curricula, in addition to the newly pressing requirement for colleges to be increasingly enterprising as well as fluent in discourses of ‘business speak’ (Gleeson and Shain 1999); to be ‘bilingual’ (Ball 1994) in both an educational and entrepreneurial sense, it is perhaps unsurprising that as colleges sought to respond to ‘the marketization of FE’ (Lucas 2004) considerable ambiguity and variability arose in relation to the emergence, and actuality, of a typical ‘FE middle-manager’, particularly as individual colleges learned to adapt in terms of their specific localised contexts. However, while there are specific differences that, necessarily, require
sufficient consideration, Page’s (2011b) more recent work demonstrates similarities and consistencies in the particular working practices of the MM which chime with Alexiadou (2001) who writes about some of the ways in which managers position themselves in relation to teaching staff; suggesting that such ‘positioning’ is an essential part of middle-management work. However, while Alexiadou (2001) foregrounds the policy context that explicitly informs the changed FE landscape and which frames middle-managers’ work, Page (2011b) pays it scant attention. The latter’s stance is perhaps indicative of the time elapsed since Incorporation whereby it is not considered such a momentous ‘rupture’ (Foucault 1969) which weighs heavily on more contemporaneous considerations despite, unsurprisingly, its prominent foregrounding by contributors in earlier FE-related publications (Ainley and Bailey 1997; Gleeson and Shain 1999; Kerfoot and Whitehead 1998; Randle and Brady 1994, 1997; Robson 1998; Whitehead 1996, 1999). However, although Page (2011b) chooses not to foreground Incorporation, his work, like that of Gleeson (2001), suggests that frequent organisational restructuring exercises within individual colleges are a distinguishing feature of the FE sector and which, plausibly, can be linked back to such prior reform. Such restructuring is likely to have significant implications for FE MMs and suggests that the institutional context where MMs carry out their work is far from stable. Moreover, his findings resonate with those of Gleeson and Shain (1999) where they highlight the significant number of middle-managers who expressed feelings of vulnerability in terms of job security.

In synthesising the above exposition it is clear that the literatures about the FE middle-manager are far from abundant and those that exist indicate that ‘the FE middle-manager’ is problematic in terms of, inter alia, three key aspects: variance in specific hierarchical position and job specification– hybrid MM, or wholly MM; the focus and context of MMs’ work – curriculum and/or service-based; and, the particular perspective adopted in relation to key aspects of their work – micro-political/power-knowledge or role/function, as foregrounded (or not), by the particular researcher-writer. Consequently, the section of the literature review which immediately follows is divided into the work of key contributors whose publications provide the basis for the above three conclusions.
Firstly, the work of Ann Briggs will be reviewed; Briggs has produced a series of publications about FE Middle-Management and previously held the position of ‘Head of Section’ in an FE college with responsibility for 30 full-time and 30 part-time staff (A. Briggs, email communication, May 24, 2012). Secondly, publications by Dennis Gleeson will be incorporated, including those works produced in partnership with others, such as Farzana Shain. Gleeson is arguably the most consistent contributor to this specific field since Incorporation, and a published researcher in other FE-related areas of study (see, for example, Gleeson and James 2007). Thirdly, the work of Damien Page, previously a First-Tier Manager (FTM) within a large inner city college (Page 2010b), will be reviewed. Page, who is a more recent contributor to this field, has published a number of relevant papers.

Moreover, in presenting the following section of the literature review in this way, I adopt a similar position to Gunter et al. (2013) who, in their consideration of distributed leadership within the school-setting, write: ‘our position is not to present an exhaustive cataloguing of the literature, but to use projects, publications and people as illuminative of position and positioning within a field’ (p.558). Thus, Briggs (2005, 2006) work can be considered from a functional position with its emphasis on ‘developing types or using models to create meaning and understanding’ (Gunter et al. 2013, p.560), ‘to improve [middle-management] practice’ (p.563). In contrast, Gleeson’s work can be located in critical and socially critical knowledge production: critical knowledge production, when considering middle-management ‘as an idea and how this links with practice’ (Gunter et al. 2013, p.565) [Emphases added]; specifically, for instance, when recognising the middle-manager as a ‘mediator of change’ (Gleeson and Shain 1999) and when understanding their work as a form of distributed leadership; socially critical, in being attentive to, for instance, how middle-managers ‘are positioned as disciplined [subjects] required to produce data’ (Gunter et al. 2013, p.568). Finally, Page’s (2010a, 2010b, 2011a, 2011b) works can be considered in similar terms to Gleeson and Shain (1999): critical and socially critical in understanding their FTM position as both manager and teacher; hierarchical positions occupied by individuals who, just as Gleeson and Shain (1999) recognise, are ‘caught in the middle’, whereby those tensions produced as a consequence of their hybrid (and often oppositional) identities, yield specific
resistant yet, frequently, pragmatic working practices (Page 2011a, 2011b). Moreover, Page (2011a) renders a specific typology for First Tier Managers that accounts for the differing amounts of pedagogic and management labour within their work and resultant job design, hence, the knowledge generated by his study can be located, like Briggs (2005, 2006), in terms of functional knowledge whereby published research ‘provides models and rationales for practitioners to improve their practice’ (Gunter et al. 2013, p.563).

Finally, the literature review will conclude by discussing some of the more significant implications arising from the published work of these three writers; considering how their research informs my own particular study into the FE middle-manager.

Understanding the FE Middle-manager - contributions by Ann Briggs

Ann Briggs draws on her earlier work (2003) to provide ‘a typology for the generic middle manager’ (Briggs 2005, p.31) [Emphasis added] in order to better understand and communicate ‘the nature of the role’ (Briggs 2005, p.28). Based on qualitative data obtained via four college case-studies, she constructs individual models which explicate five key ‘aspects’ of the MM role, namely: corporate agent, implementer, staff manager, liaison and leader. While Briggs (2005) recognises that the use of conceptual models can be considered both a simplification and an abstraction she proposes that they provide a means by which organisational ‘realities’ can be understood: a device to filter complexity in order to guide and support effective future decision-making within FE colleges. Those five aspects of the FE MM’s role, for which she proposes individual models, are now summarised.

Corporate agent: This role-aspect refers to the manager’s understanding of their work for the college as a whole. Typically, managers who exemplify this demonstrate their awareness of their institution’s values and are able to account for their participation in strategic activities. MMs also recognise how their work makes contributions to strategy, both in formulation as well as implementation and their involvement in the ‘big picture’ (Briggs 2005, p.32). Briggs (2005) notes: ‘they demonstrate an understanding of the framework of accountability of the college, and of their obligations within it’ (p.33).
Implementer: Briggs (2005) proposes that this is the ‘most visible feature’ (p.33) of the role and essentially involves the implementation of college policy i.e. ‘making it happen’ (p.32). She asserts that it these aspects of MMs’ work that produce feelings of both pressure and inadequacy due to the sheer volume of work required. She further notes: ‘this aspect of role includes activities such as problem-solving and disturbance handling’ (p.34); observing that implementation is not necessarily straightforward. There is evidence of MMs being both creative and flexible in response to the challenges inherent in such work whereby successful outcomes, when achieved, yield positive effects which buttress their self-image.

Staff manager: this aspect is understood as managing the differentiated needs of staff, utilising collective staff expertise and exercising team leadership. In her case-studies Briggs (2005) found that the main difficulties expressed by MMs were ‘managing underperforming staff and managing staff at a distance’ (p.37). Notably, she documents that many managers adopted ‘a largely intuitive approach’ (p.37) to this role-aspect. She reports that MMs frequently perceived supportive staff teams as essential to their effectiveness as managers; some even recognising them as instrumental in terms of their own individual and personal well-being. Furthermore, Briggs (2005) identifies the complexities associated with the need for managers to exercise judgements that require them to gauge and maintain an appropriate ‘distance’ from staff; staff who they not only manage, but who they also rely upon to make positive contributions in terms of their own individual effectiveness as managers.

Liaison: Briggs (2005) recognises this as an essential aspect of the MM role that is tied to the complexity and size of FE colleges where particular functions are separated into specific departments. Moreover, she proposes that, like those role-aspects of ‘implementer’ and ‘staff manager’, ‘liaison’ is a means of ‘carrying out the corporate role’ (p.39) [Emphasis added]. Liaison activities within formalised college structures are understood horizontally and vertically, as well as with external agents, requiring MMs to understand ‘the systems and communication routes of the organization’ (p.39). Briggs (2005) observes that the ‘mechanical’ structures

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15 Briggs’ use of the referent ‘mechanical’ is drawn from the work of organizational theorists, Burns and Stalker (1961) and their models of mechanistic and organic organization structures.
characteristic of FE colleges frequently inhibit effective communication and, consequently, individuals ‘have to find ways to meet, work together, build mutual trust and create effective patterns of liaison’ (p.39) [Emphases added].

Leader: The fifth and final key aspect, Briggs (2005) claims, is ‘potentially the most contentious’ (p.41) as she asserts that the term ‘leader’ is rarely used in the context of FE colleges. While she argues that ‘dispersed leadership’ is often necessitated due to the complexity and size of colleges, MMs in her study recognised the adoption of a blend and range of leadership styles, contingent upon specific circumstances. However, some MMs balked at the very notion of ‘leadership’ recognising their role in terms of ‘taking the king’s shilling’16 (p.42); an anti-thetical position viz. leading and leadership. However, Briggs (2005) notes that this role-aspect may be obfuscated by the pressures of day-to-day implementation activities and that MMs may, unwittingly, engage in leadership. Citing Lumby, she notes: ‘leadership may be embodied in what people do, not what they say’ (Lumby 2001, cited in Briggs 2005, p.42).

In producing her typology of role-aspects Briggs (2005) provides a separate schematic model for all five, each of which depict key environmental factors drawn from analyses of her data identified as being significant (e.g. internal systems and management structures). Consideration of these key environmental factors permits their subsequent assessment in terms of how each potentially facilitates or impedes the particular role-aspect. Consequently, Briggs’s (2005) five models act as conceptual devices to scrutinize specific role-aspects of MMs, accounting for key factors within their environment that influence each one positively and negatively, both actually and potentially. Finally, Briggs (2005) synthesises the five separate models into a single overarching model as a similar means to consider the MM role within a whole college context, offering the following rationale:

If the middle manager role is the one around which the work of the college articulates, then factors which impact positively or negatively upon the role may be considered as key factors for whole college

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16 ‘Taking the king’s shilling’ is an expression that describes the historical practice of soldiers signing up to join the British army during the Napoleonic wars and where, once they had accepted the king’s payment, it was virtually impossible for them to leave (http://www.royalscotsgrenadiers.com/kingsshilling.html, Access date: July 8, 2012)
Understanding of these factors at an individual college level is essential. (p.48) [Emphases added]

Observing that the FE sector ‘is not coherent’ (Briggs 2005, p.48) and that college provisions and sources of funding are variable, Briggs (2005) observes that her overarching model should be considered, for the purposes of achieving individual college coherence, as *an ideal type*; facilitating evaluations, provoking dialogue and thought, by college managers and leaders, to that end. In constructing such a model Briggs’ work (2005, 2006) contributes to functional research in knowledge production about FE middle-management work.

**Understanding the FE Middle-manager - contributions by Dennis Gleeson**

While Briggs’ publications seek to unify the identity of the FE MM, through the construction of a typology around the work of the *generic* middle-manager, by contrast, the section which follows foregrounds the uncertainty and complexity surrounding FE middle-management identity whereby writers such as Prichard (2000) recognise it as a ‘contradictory and problematic position’ (p.17). It draws considerably from two key publications by Dennis Gleeson; chronologically, the first is co-authored with Farzana Shain (Gleeson and Shain 1999); the second is co-authored with David Knights (Gleeson and Knights 2008).

Concurring with Prichard (2000), Gleeson and Shain (1999) describe the role played by ‘academic middle managers’ as ‘complex and contradictory’ (p. 461), while Gleeson and Knights (2008) state that MMs’ working practices are ‘significantly more complex, innovative and “senior” than their designation implies’ (p.60) in an education sector ‘that has more to do with *plugging gaps* and *filling holes* than developing FE’s workforce’ (p.62) [Emphases added].

In explicating the actual working practices of the MM, Gleeson and Shain (1999) further observe that MMs ‘have to deal with complex moral, administrative and pragmatic decisions on a daily basis, often bound by severe financial constraints’ (p.473). Such constraints and complexity are illustrated by drawing on those interview data collected by Gleeson and Knights (2008) when they document a Faculty Head’s observations:
The idea that you can transplant a Business Practice Model easily into FE is misguided . . . business leaders who come into FE and want to work on those principles can’t get their head around everything that goes on in FE . . . the constant audit, inspection, funding contradictions . . . this inhibits a lot of existing practice. (p.58)

In the same publication, they include a Head of School’s comments; capturing the confusion and potential for misunderstandings around funding and administrative regulations that often impinge upon the working day of those ‘caught in the middle’ (Gleeson and Shain 1999):

As a Head of School you get if from above and below ... there’s often stress about missing targets that we don’t know about or have changed at the last minute ... is it LSC’s (Learning and Skills Council) fault or ours? (Gleeson and Knights 2008, p. 59)

Related to such uncertainty and complexity, as articulated by Gleeson and Knight’s MMs, Lucas (2004) makes the astute point that while Incorporation may have been generally well supported by the majority of college leaders in 1993, he proposes that few of them realised that any new-found freedoms, outside local authority control, would be replaced with complex, often opaque, centralised government regulations; regulations demanding compliance to funding regimes administered and controlled by bureaucratic structures such as the newly created Further Education Funding Council (superseded by the Learning and Skills Council in April 2001). Thus, it is important to keep in mind that while Incorporation might have heralded a new era for FE it would be remiss to consider it as announcing a period of unfettered freedom characterised by institutional competition between colleges, sixth-forms and private sector providers in a deregulated free market. Incorporation, as Lucas (2004) and others suggest (Alexiadou and Brock 1999; Kerfoot and Whitehead 2000; Levacic 2005), is more usefully and correctly understood as a period defined by the establishment of a ‘quasi-market’. According to Le Grand and Bartlett (1993), a ‘quasi-market’ is where, on the supply-side there is competition between providers, yet on the demand-side purchasing power is expressed, not through consumer autonomy in terms of individual capital resources, market knowledge and price competition (as in the ‘free market’), but by a centralised regulatory agency influencing policy decisions. Such a situation is recognised by Simmons (2008) as ‘a system of state capitalism rather than an environment of private enterprise’ (p.363).

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17 The Learning and Skills Council was replaced by the Skills Funding Agency in April 2010.
Consequently, it is the complexity inherent within such arrangements which weigh heavily on FE institutions and that continue to be instrumental in influencing the work of MMs. I propose that Gleeson’s work (in partnership with, separately, both Shain and Knights) demonstrates the very real influence and effect of the ‘quasi-market’ upon the historical ontology of the Further Education middle-manager, particularly since 1993. Indeed, it can be plausibly argued that it is the very conditions of the quasi-market that necessitate the FE MM; the catalyst for their actuality; accentuating their working practices as ‘mediators of change’ (Gleeson and Shain 1999) in a refashioned landscape. Moreover, Gleeson and Shain’s understanding of the MM as a mediator of change affirms Ball’s (2008) more recent claim that it is ‘the manager’ who is ‘the central figure’ of contemporary education reform and who he recognises as both ‘an agent of change’ as well as ‘a cipher for policy’ (Ball 2008, p.43).

Contributing further to a sense of caution when considering the work of the FE MM, Gleeson and Shain (1999) write in terms of the ‘ambiguous territory’ (p.469) they occupy between lecturers and senior managers; obfuscating a clear understanding of the role among senior managers and lecturers alike, and even middle-managers themselves. Moreover, in considering their identities - ‘in the middle’ - as managers of individuals lower down the hierarchy, rather than as individuals who are managed by those who are positioned higher up, they propose that further ambiguity afflicts their identity and working practices, as if a key expectation is the mediation of messages between senior management and teaching staff (in order to broker change, for example), citing Watson (1997), Gleeson and Knights (2008) suggest a conspicuous imbalance between managed and managing, in favour of the latter. Significantly, this has further implications for understandings of ‘leadership’ which they recognise as a particular discourse that has been in-vogue in recent years; part of ‘the historical cycle of fads and fashions’ (Gleeson and Knights 2008, p.51) in organizational improvement discourse whereby notions such as ‘distributed leadership’ should more often be properly considered as, not so much a distribution of power to, and among, MMs, but rather ‘a distribution of operational responsibilities’ (Lumby et al. 2005, p.1) [Emphasis added]. Hence, there is a risk of establishing ‘forms of distributed leadership that maintain the status quo’ (Hatcher
2005, cited in Gunter 2012, p.127) and which, consequently, emphasise the MM’s ‘crucial role in the manufacture of consent’ (Gleeson and Shain 1999, p.466) as distinct from alternative identities, such as empowered middle-leader.

Furthermore, Gleeson and Knights (2008) imply that sufficient scrutiny of constructions such as ‘distributed’ and ‘dispersed leadership’ (Briggs 2005) is necessary as they speculate whether power-sharing and the appearance of supposedly increased participative engagement: ‘is not simply a smokescreen to dissemble what is an underlying reworking of neo-liberal reform’ (Gleeson and Knights 2008, p.62). They explicitly acknowledge the problems of adequately explaining organisational realities via easily-used and snappy referents such as ‘distributed leadership’: ‘[We are] conscious of the tendency for these abstracted distillations of practice to caricature what is more complex, relational and difficult to capture’ (p.52); concurring with Gunter et al. (2013) in their acknowledgement of the requirement to subject such language and terminology, which seek to describe everyday practices, to critical analyses that are concerned ‘with the realism of everyday work using narratives about agency and power’ (p.558) [Emphases added].

In concluding this particular section of the literature review, attention will be briefly given to two further aspects of MM identity and working practices. The first relates to the significant amounts of unrecognised work regularly carried out by FE MMs which, according to Gleeson and Knights (2008), is a specific consequence of the sector itself. They note:

> Intense internal and external pressures on FE generate conditions that hide an ‘extra hours’ culture in which middle managers plug gaps in provision and resources, take on additional duties and engage in underground working practices to get things done, over and above their contractual duties (Gleeson 2006, cited in Gleeson and Knights 2008, p.62)

Such an understanding accords with Shain (2000) who refers to the ‘dirty job’ (p.224) of middle management; a description that reflects the requirement for them to work long hours to cope with the multiple demands of teaching, management and still further responsibilities.

Finally, the second aspect and which, plausibly, relates to the first, in terms of the willingness or, indeed, need for MMs to accede to an extra hours culture, is that FE
MMs are vulnerable in the face of the constant threat of redundancy. As Gleeson and Shain (1999) observe: ‘The growing culture of reorganisation, delayering or restructuring poses a threat to the life span of the FE middle manager’ (p.472). Citing a MM interview in their study, they document:

Personally speaking, I feel extremely vulnerable. The main reason for that is I am quite highly paid as a college manager. My job could be done by somebody younger who would have a lower salary than me. (Gleeson and Shain 1999, p.473)

Again, this concurs with Shain (2000), who notes: ‘continual reorganisation and restructuring means that managers live in fear of being “restructured out” of the organisation’ (p.223). Consequently, in accounting for such expressed vulnerability it is hardly surprising that some MMs articulate a culture of long-hours.

It is evident in presenting Gleeson’s contributions, with others above, and by other researchers separately (e.g. Shain 2000), these publications contribute to critical and socially critical research in knowledge production about FE middle-management work; for example, subjecting taken-for-granted terms such as ‘distributed leadership’ to critical analyses (suggesting the need for further scrutiny beyond the scope of this thesis), as well as illuminating the vulnerabilities of role incumbents through, for instance, their references to underground working practices whereby socially critical researchers are concerned with power and agency and ‘accounts of how the realities of practices might not only be recognized but [can] be proactively used to structure and culture [education institutions] differently’ (Gunter et al. 2013, p.568).

Understanding the FE Middle-manager - contributions by Damien Page

The third major component of the literature review examines the work of Damien Page which focusses on the FTM (First Tier Manager) –managers that teach and manage - who he recognises as:

... [t]he final implementer, translating policy in a learning environment. Surveilled and surveilling, managing and managed, the role is precarious yet crucial, not just for the success of the organisation but, more critically for the success of learners. (Page 2011a, p.102)
This section will report the salient features of three published papers (Page 2010a, 2011a, 2011b) where those data within them are drawn from Page’s PhD dissertation (Page 2010b).

Page (2011a), having previously held the position of FTM, specifically sets out to highlight the diversity of the role, to account for the daily experiences of the FTM and to ‘provide a typology of first tier management’ (p.102). Initially, he presents findings from job descriptions contained in 46 college job-packs (obtained via the Times Educational Supplement website) where he demonstrates the range of teaching hours expected in FTM work: the lowest amount of teaching hours being specified as 14, while the highest being as much as 22.5 (noting that FE lecturers, on average, are expected to teach 24 hours per week). However, he observes that most job-packs did not actually stipulate the number of teaching hours expected. From his documentary analysis, he notes both the diversity and heterogeneity in job specifications which indicated that, while all of the specified FTM roles certainly occupied identical positions within college hierarchies (between lecturers and MMs), each had been designed to account for the needs of the particular localised college context. Prior to presenting his interview findings from 27 FTMs in four general English FE colleges, he writes: ‘The more brief the job description … the more room for contextual contestation and definition at the local rather than the organisational level’ (p.104). In so doing, Page (2011a) foregrounds the contextualised nature of his FTM study, noting ‘it is this space’ that he intends to explore.

In his subsequent exploration, Page (2011a) refers to what he terms ‘role elasticity’ (p.106) as a way to conceptualise the stretching of the FTM’s role, depending upon the interplay and demands of both the FTM’s curriculum area and their respective MMs:

The actual parameters of the role were constantly being stretched and key to this malleability were middle managers who changed the FTM role according to their own needs as much as the curriculum needs.

(p.106)

Interestingly, Page (2011a) notes FTMs recognised that many of the requests made by their respective MMs were as a consequence of senior management pressures (as applied to MMs) and, consequently, they absorbed such additional workloads in order to support their immediate line-manager. However, he observes that such
willingness to assist was strongly related to the autonomy inherent within the FTM role whereby tasks, when delegated, were without high levels of prescriptive direction. Such autonomy, Page (2011a) claims, is ‘one of the most motivating aspects of the FTM role’ (p.106). He speculates upon a range of inter-related explanations for this autonomy: that its stems from the diverse and elastic nature of FTM’s work; that MMs, in the interests of reciprocity and self-preservation are, to a large degree, obligated to facilitate autonomy; it is an affirmation of MM’s trust and acknowledgement of FTM’s professionalism and, finally, the heavy workloads that often swamp MMs means that they are less interested in how particular work-tasks are carried out, than with actual results.

Page (2011a) notes that the notion of ‘role elasticity’ is informed by the working context of the FTM which ‘was unpredictable and chaotic’ (p.109) and that FTM’s plans were often ‘regularly sabotaged by the unexpected’ (p.109). He writes that ‘fire-fighting’ was one of the most frequently used expressions throughout his study; considered to be an actual skill and recognised by interviewees as an essential FTM competence. Page (2011a) claims that ‘As a result of role-elasticity… FTMs would attempt to absorb everything’ (p.109) [Emphases added]. Moreover, in striving to manage the volatile nature of their working environment, in addition to satisfying many of the immediate gratification needs of senior managers, he observes that many FTMs experienced ‘home invasion’ (p.109). However, challenging those writers who claim that long hours are reflective of ‘the masculine culture of FE’ (e.g. Kerfoot and Whitehead 2000), Page (2011a) asserts that FTMs worked long hours, not because they had internalised the corporate goals and aspects of wider college culture, which they eschewed, but as a consequence of ‘the particular context of the FTM role’ (p.110) [Emphases added].

Consequently, in attempts to provide useful ways to understand the working context and role of the FTM more fully, in sharp contrast to those management inventories which, Page (2011a) proposes, are designed to be applicable to ‘all levels of the management hierarchy … and that [assume] management in the private sector is comparable to management in the public sector’ (p.110) [Emphases added], he constructs a typology of first tier management which he considers particularly apposite to the hierarchical stratum of the FTM and accounts for the peculiarities of
the FE setting. In so doing, he proposes that FTMs are subject to a trialectic comprising ‘three primary forces ... [of] students, team and organization’ (p.111) [Original emphasis]. Page (2011a) claims that FTMs were ‘dragged’ between the demands of these three primary forces as a response to particular aspects of ‘fire-fighting’. Yet, crucially, he notes that while FTM’s positioning and the prioritisation towards each of them were subject to some individual agency, other factors exerted influence: ‘especially the elevation of the FTM in the formal hierarchy [and] the ratio of teaching hours to remission and salary’ (p.111) [Emphasis added].

Elaborating his FTM typology, Page (2011a) employs a metaphorical vehicle as a means to ‘add analytical depth and richness’ (Fleming and Spicer 2003, cited in Page 2011a, p.112). The metaphor chosen is based on religious-faith which Page (2011a) considers particularly suitable, given: the belief of FE staff in education’s value; the ethical, moral and social purpose of teaching when considered as a vocation; and, staff’s faith in education as a potentially transformative agent in learners’ lives. By deploying metaphors of faith, Page (2011a) claims that the ‘belief-orientation’ of FTMs defined not only the ways that individuals perceived their role, but how they performed it.

As a result, FTMs found themselves in one of four positions: student-focused (fundamentalist), team-focused (priest), organisation-focused (converts) or omni-focused (martyrs). (Page 2011a, p.112)

In applying his faith-based typology, Page (2011a) found a clear relationship between the number of remitted hours and financial rewards the FTM position attracted, to the particular faith-position adopted by them. For example, where remitted hours and financial rewards were limited, FTMs positioned themselves as fundamentalists: ‘they see their status as teachers first and foremost; “manager” was a title rather than an obligation’ (p.113). Conversely, where the balance of hours clearly privileged management duties and contained a ‘financial uplift’ (p.118), Page (2011a) recognised such FTMs as converts:

Student success for converts equates to sustained funding for the college and, in the end, institutional survival in a competitive marketplace. Learning from this perspective is for the institution rather than the individual. (p.116)

Where there was a more even balance between teaching and management duties, Page (2011a) observed increased diversity among faith positions and enhanced
agency in the individual FTM’s predilection. Expressing caution, Page (2011a) observes that ‘not all participants fell neatly into one of the faith positions’ (p.118), and that his typology should therefore be tentatively conceived. However, he proposes that it may be beneficial when considering the design of the FTM role in colleges and a potential basis to inform the training of newly appointed FE sector managers. Moreover, he notes that those managers who are senior to FTMs may find it useful, by encouraging them to be more circumspect in terms of the particular demands they make upon FTMs, for example, restricting the amount of data collection and administrative reporting requests where an FTM is likely to position themselves as a fundamentalist.

Reviewing Page’s (2011b) paper, it, too, draws upon the same data, collected and analysed, in his other work (2010a, 2010b, 2011a): making reference to the trialectic (see above) and explaining the FTM role through his metaphorically-based faith typology. However, in this publication, Page (2011b) emphasises the resistant nature of FTM work:

… [f]aced with the proletarianisation of performativity, the panoptic gaze of organisational surveillance and the excesses of managerialism, FTMs were found to be highly resistant, employing strategies that traversed the continuum from the ‘decaf’ and covert such as alternative discursive positioning, to acts of overt, ‘espresso’ resistance such as refusal. (p.4)

Conceptualising managerial resistance (an area of study where, Page (2011b) notes, the literature is sparse), he references Contu’s (2008) notion of ‘decaf’ resistance which, while Page (2011b) recognises as a legitimate form of organisational dissent, involves no action and is without impact. They are, he observes:

… [t]hose transgressions that reproduce and support relations of power through the concomitant dis-identification with corporate culture and practicing of corporate rituals. (p.2)

Such ‘decaf’ resistance (exemplified in ‘cynicism’, for example), is evocative of Gleeson and Shain’s (1999) middle-managers, the vast majority of whom, in their study, were considered to be ‘strategic compliers’; an observation also made by Page (2011b). Such compliance, they considered, to be ‘a form of artful pragmatism’ (Gleeson and Shain 1999, p.482) as MMs attempted to reconcile managerial and professional interests; a strategy deployed to simultaneously balance the multiple tensions inherent in MM identity. Contrastingly, Page (2011b) offers a more potent
alternative to ‘artful pragmatism’, or ‘decaf’ resistance; citing an earlier publication that explores resistance and power in the context of FTMs’ work, he writes:

... [a] consideration of managerial resistance must include evidence of more potent forms – for every example of decaf resistance, there is an example of ‘espresso resistance’ (Page 2010a): short, strong actions that are truly oppositional. (p.2)

‘Espresso resistance’ Page (2011b) considers to be an overt form of resistance; distinct from resistance recognised as covert and understood as ‘decaf’. Forms of overt resistance materialised when, for example, FTMs refused to follow instructions, or when they requested meetings with senior managers to confront them about issues arising from agenda initiated further up the hierarchy and, about which, FTMs and their teams disagreed. Moreover, Page (2011b) recognises other resistant behaviours which occupy a more central position, between ‘decaf’ and ‘espresso’ resistance:

At the cusp between overt and covert resistance were ignoring behaviours where, rather than FTMs dissenting about instructions or requests, they simply ignored them. In some cases, the ignoring of instructions was justified according to role boundaries which, for FTMs, were badly defined and subject to constant interpretation. (p.5)

In drawing attention to role boundaries that are unclear, Page’s (2011b) work suggests further scope for FTM manoeuvrability; permitting the exploitation of weaknesses in role definition by FTMs; enabling them to privilege preferred aspects of work while neglecting those they dislike.

Crucially, however, Page (2011b) concludes that while FTM resistance can be reasonably considered ‘oppositional’, he recognises such resistance in ‘pragmatic terms’ (p.9), as acknowledged by Fleming and Spicer (2008). Moreover, Fleming and Spicer (2008) write that ‘organizational struggle is extremely pragmatic’ (p.307) [Emphasis added], noting:

People do not engage in struggles to clandestinely advance revolutionary political projects. Instead, they are simply endeavouring to “get by,” involving rather modest goals within very specific and circumscribed fields. (Fleming and Spicer 2008, p.307)

Thus, Page (2011b) notes that FTMs’ ignoring or refusing behaviours should be considered not necessarily as oppositional, but rather as ‘coping mechanisms’ (p.9),
to manage the demands of the job and the concomitant pressures of the student-team-organisation trialectic.

Prichard (2000), in critiquing Whitehead’s (1997) notion of ‘gendered FE management’, understands managerial resistance in similar though different terms, as a ‘disruption and subversion of the dominant discourse’ (Prichard 2000, p.19) which, he claims, occur at various points and times. He recognises that resistance can be understood as neither strategic, nor even rational, but on-going, as a consequence of those ‘moments, spaces and gaps [which] exist between those practices demanded by managerial discourses’ (p.19) where individual managers are intermittently re-fashioned:

... [w]herein subjects reconstitute and become reconstituted in discourse, a process reinforced by the very fragility and unpredictability of being (Whitehead 1997, cited in Prichard 2000, p.19).

Such resistance and reworking of managerial discourses are understood as a consequence of individual managers’ historically-unique subjectivities and the very fragility and ambivalence in ‘ontological being’ (Prichard 2000, p.19). In these understandings, Prichard (2000) foregrounds both structure-agency tensions as well as the management of identity, by individuals, over time.

Finally, from his study, Page (2011b) further observes that FTMs and senior managers rarely interacted and that direct and unfiltered interactions, whereby communications are not always mediated by middle-managers, might assist in reducing the distance between hierarchical levels that potentially fuel resistant behaviours. Furthermore, the consideration of direct and unfiltered interactions takes on additional significance when acknowledging the vulnerability of MMs (Gleeson and Shain 1999, Shain 2000) who may be reluctant to adequately represent ‘lower-order concerns’ for fear of appearing antagonistic towards senior managers. Moreover, such MM vulnerability and reluctance to represent concerns arising from those who are hierarchically lower, such as FTMs, raises concerns from a socially-critical perspective whereby voices are silenced, or absent, as well as a functional position, whereby such silencing and absence, in the longer term, yields institutional dysfunction through inattentiveness to, for instance, crucial operational issues.
Discussion – implications of the published literatures for my own research study

Having reviewed those available literatures deemed most relevant in formulating an understanding of the FE middle-manager, consideration is now given to how such work informs my own study by summarising some of their inter-relationships.

Considering the work of Ann Briggs (2005), her ‘generic typology of the middle manager’ might well provoke criticism from those proponents of anti-reductionist methodologies who are wary of analyses that yield the ‘Collective Individual’ (Stronach et al. 2002); sceptical of simplistic constructions resulting from epistemological determinism. However, for the purposes of MM identity, her typology is useful in the very stability it provides. For instance, Gleeson and Shain (1999) write of the ‘ambiguous territory’ occupied by their MM interviewees, while Page (2011a) documents the ‘chaotic’ working context of FTMs, characterised by practices widely recognised by them as ‘fire-fighting’. Consequently, Briggs’ (2005) typology provides a means to stabilise MM identity; cutting through much of the ambiguity, recognised by others, in order to arrive at a position whereby, middle-management work and identity, can be framed more definitively. Furthermore, by not only emphasising key ‘role-aspects’ but also the ‘environmental factors’ instrumental in their enactment, she provides a focus for considering the likely success (or otherwise) of specific parts of their job. Thus, Briggs’ (2005) conceptualisation of the FE middle-manager, via her typology, facilitates the consideration of what might usefully be in place e.g. internal MIS systems, or the establishment of clear communication structures, prior to getting on with the job of middle-management; indicating necessary key resources and suggested ways of working, in order to provide a degree of solidity in the face of a volatile context.

Such considerations appear particularly apposite given the acknowledged heterogeneity of college hierarchical-arrangements, in addition to the noted variance in English college sizes. Moreover, in considering the actual position of the MM within FE institutions which, the preceding literature review indicates, is highly fluid, from Page’s (2011a, 2011b) FTMs – hybrid MMs -with considerable pedagogic responsibilities, to Briggs’ (2005) managers of curriculum areas – wholly MMs – with no pedagogic work, analysis of those environmental factors, identified in Briggs’
(2005) study, might be considered further: to determine which ‘environmental factors’ are specifically critical, to the particular MM hierarchical level, and those ‘role-aspects’ which are likely to be foregrounded in terms of the composition of their work. Thus, Briggs’ (2005) typology might be usefully reassessed in light of Page’s (2011a, 2011b) more recent work in terms of the FTM role.

However, while there are strengths in Briggs’ (2005) analyses, there are also identifiable limitations. Citing Gass and Harris (1996), she writes: ‘Models present an abstract or simplified description of a real-world situation’ (p.31); further observing: ‘the “lived experience” of the middle managers ... is lost’ (Briggs 2006, p.100). Hence, in filtering out complexity to provide clarity, crucially, her models are removed from the mundane, everyday practices that occur within education institutions where, for instance, neo-liberal agenda exist (Ball 2012); practices and contexts inhabited by individual agents; for example, in proposing the MM role-aspect of ‘liaison’, Briggs (2005) notes that MMs should ‘create effective patterns of liaison’ (p.39) as a means to circumvent the rigidity implicit in ‘mechanical’ structures. In doing so, she recognises that MMs, on occasion, might be best served by thinking imaginatively; to transcend the constraints of the formal organisation. However, her analyses do not account for those micropolitical aspects, contextualised and interwoven with wider neo-liberal agenda, framed within managerial cultures, which have the potential to inhibit the organic structures she advocates. As Gleeson and Shain (1999) document:

In [MM-name’s] college, middle-managers attempted to meet as a separate group to develop innovative strategies to deal with pressures of work intensification and income generation. Paradoxically, such action posed a threat to the dominant managerial culture of the college and was swiftly halted by the Principal. (p.484)

Notwithstanding the notion that Briggs proposes that such creativity is intended to be beyond the reaches of the institution’s formal gaze (Foucault 1975), this draws attention to those micropolitical aspects that are complex and slippery, as noted by Gleeson and Knights (2008); for instance, the difficulties of capturing and adequately conceptualizing notions such as ‘trust’, implied in the example cited above. Thus, Briggs’ (2005) typology, to a large degree, is decontextualized; bracketing out specific institutional conditions. However, it remains informative as the typology of
MM role-aspects, as outlined, can still be considered within the particular context and prevailing organisational conditions.

In further contrast to Briggs’ (2005) unifying perspective in MMs’ work, Gleeson and Knights (2008) emphasise the contingent role and identity of the FE MM, encapsulated, to a large degree, in a sector they characterise as being about ‘plugging gaps and filling holes’ (p.62). Moreover, their perspective is endorsed by Page (2011a, 2011b) who documents the sheer diversity in FTMs’ work, suggesting that middle-management work does not lend itself to a unified construction and is, instead, determined by the particular contextualised locale. However, what is clear from the literature review is that those publications of Briggs, Gleeson (in partnership with others) and Page, all provide particular strengths in formulating an understanding of the working practices and identity of the MM. Notably, Page’s (2011a, 2011b) more recent publications are a timely addition to this particular research field and, although they contrast with the work of Briggs (2005, 2006), are highly complementary to the identity work explicated by Gleeson et al. (1999, 2008); for instance, in foregrounding micro-political aspects, such as ‘managerial resistance’; formulating the conceptualisation of ‘espresso resistance’ to understand MM behaviours, as distinct from ‘decaf resistance’, the latter behaviour resonating with Gleeson and Shain’s (1999) ‘artfully pragmatic’ MMs who they considered to be ‘strategically compliant’. Moreover, his work is a particularly useful addition when considering the time elapsed since Gleeson and Shain’s (1999) publication which can plausibly be considered as an initial foray into, what was at the time, a newly created area for academic inquiry (particularly if the creation and proliferation of the MM is understood as a direct consequence of Incorporation). It is now more than 20 years since the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 and Page’s (2011a, 2011b) recent FTM work suggests that the FE middle-manager remains as ambiguous a position as at the time of Gleeson and Shain’s (1999) study; emphasising heterogeneity rather than homogeneity. Following the more recent Education Act 2011 (DfE 2011a) which empowered further education colleges to autonomously dissolve their corporations to become wholly privatised college institutions, such heterogeneity will, plausibly, persist.
Summary

By considering the available published literatures about the FE middle-manager which, interested writers note, are far from voluminous (Lumby 1997; McNay 1988; Page 2011a) this chapter has made clear that in constructing curriculum-based FE middle-manager identity when, generally considered, it is characterised by ambiguity and heterogeneity that is largely reflective of a sector understood to be complex and diverse (Ainley and Bailey 1997; Clow 2001; Lucas 2004). Consequently, this is significant to my own study particularly when considering both the design of data collection instruments and how any collected data are to be subsequently analysed. For example, it suggests that my interview design and its subsequent implementation, while needing to be well considered, should facilitate and afford sufficient opportunities for differences to be expressed so that informative heterogeneities can be adequately captured. However, it should not be as loose that difference is unlimited, rendering middle-management identity so uncertain that opportunities to recognise those critical practices and ways of working, necessary for effective curriculum-based middle-management work, are lost; and ‘where everything is covered in the greyness of endless differences’ (Alasuutari 1995, p.16). In addition, due attention needs to be paid to certain conceptual imperatives that will enable the organisational context to be examined in regard to the working practices and identities of the middle-manager, as well as the strategic plan documents of each the colleges. Consequently, I intend presenting the Foucauldian conceptual tools of archaeology and genealogy as the means to achieve this. These conceptual tools are presented and explained in the next chapter.
Chapter Four
Research Methods and Methodology

Introduction

This chapter considers the research methods and methodology adopted for the study. It begins by explaining the data collection design, the sampling strategies adopted and some of the more pragmatic considerations in gaining access to college middle-managers for interview purposes. Issues of validity, reliability and data triangulation are then considered, followed by ethical considerations and pertinent ‘insider-outsider’ implications when accounting for myself as ‘researcher’ and ‘FE teacher’ within the study. It next explains how Foucault’s archaeological and genealogical tools are deployed in order to conceptualise the study, providing a coherent framework and mode of analysis for those data collected, and generated by it. It explains the specific focus of each of archaeology and genealogy, and how those interview data incorporated within the thesis came to be included.

Middle-manager ‘as the case’

According to Yin (2003), case studies should be considered when: the focus of inquiry is to answer ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions; contextual conditions are relevant to the phenomenon under study; and where the boundaries are unclear (or require more clarity) between the phenomenon and the context. In my own study, the phenomenon in which I am interested are middle-management practices within the context of the college context and, specifically, the context provided by the college strategic plan document; how middle-manager agency is subject to the structure of the strategic plan document. Moreover, Baxter and Jack (2008) recognise case-studies as a means to ‘inform professional practice [and] evidence-informed decision-making in … policy realms’ (p.544); middle-management professional practices being recognised by Page (2010b) as both ‘under-researched and under-theorised’ (p.2). Consequently, it is these reasons why the middle-manager is the unit of analysis ‘as the case’: to add to the relatively limited knowledge and evidence-base about their work. Significantly, the college strategic plan documents of each of the middle-managers within the study are deemed crucial to understanding much of their work as, according to O’Connell (2005), college
strategic plans are not only instrumental in creating the culture of FE colleges, they facilitate a ‘rigorous, disciplined and systematic way’ (p.124) of conducting college business; acting as ‘a control mechanism’ (p.125) that yields ‘performance goals … milestones … and individual accountability for achieving measurable results’ (p.126).

I sought access to gather data from nine middle-manager cases drawn from three college contexts; three from each college. This facilitated the gathering of interview data as a Foucauldian ‘genealogy’ of the middle-manager subject and their practices, while also undertaking a Foucauldian ‘archaeology’, by drawing upon specific policy documents in the form of institutional strategic plans. Consequently, I gathered data from more than one college context; facilitating comparisons of data in terms of homogeneity and heterogeneity.

Focusing on three cases drawn from three separate colleges provides a ‘depth of study’, rather than necessarily a ‘breadth of study’ (Denscombe 2003, p.33), which is a generally understood justification for utilising a case-study methodology, permitting sufficient depth of analysis without being too broad, nor reliant upon cases drawn from one study-site. The external colleges selected were particular instances of General FE colleges (as opposed to Sixth-Form colleges) where curriculum-based middle-manager subjects carry out their work, sharing similar socio-economic demographics characteristic of my own place of work. Hence, although the study is a case-study of middle-management practices, MMs are located in what I understand as representations of similar institutional contexts.

Moreover, by drawing on multiple cases (three at each hierarchical level and nine in total) the exploration of differences within and between cases is afforded, and where, according to Yin (2003): ‘The goal is to replicate findings across cases’ (Yin 2003, cited in Baxter and Jack 2008, p.548) [Emphases added].

The three colleges as sites for the field work undertaken are based in the North-west region of England (please refer to Appendix A for summary descriptions) and are referred to by the following aliases: Central College, East College and West College. While there are differences in both the numbers and composition of student enrolments in the three colleges, when considered as a group, they are located, relatively, in close proximity to each other: within a concentrated area of the North-
west of England from a starting position of the college that lies centrally i.e. Central College between the other two; one is located 12 miles west - West College, while the other is located 18 miles east - East College.

The two types of data collected by the study are institutional policy statements, in the form of strategic plan documents and, semi-structured interview data, from nine middle-manager cases.

**Sampling strategy rationale, participant access and pragmatic considerations**

In considering my research sample for the purposes of appropriate data collection, Bell (1993, p.83) observes that: ‘all researchers are dependent on the goodwill and availability of subjects’. She asserts: ‘you may be forced to interview anyone from the total population who is available and willing at the time’ (p.83). Bell (1993) continues:

> Opportunity samples of this kind are generally acceptable as long as the make-up of the sample is clearly stated and the limitations of such data are realized. (p.83)

I designed the study to include three FE colleges, in contrast to the single college study I designed for my pilot project (Fort 2011). In widening the research study to incorporate additional colleges a more credible basis for the production of a doctoral thesis is facilitated. Specifically, it affords the opportunity to interview middle-managers in colleges that have different hierarchical arrangements, which have variances in provision of specific curricula to prospective and existing learner markets. Accordingly, such variances and differences chime with Briggs (2005, 2006) who remarks on the very diversity of the FE sector and the individual college structures which constitute it.

I gained access to the three middle-managers at East College via a gatekeeper: a senior manager I was able to contact who had previously been my own line manager, when employed as a middle-manager at West College. This gatekeeper was able to provide me with access to the three middle-managers who are identified within the study using the following aliases: Louise, Monica and Nigel. (Please refer to Appendix E for their respective job titles, hierarchical middle position and
curriculum area of responsibility; please refer to Appendices I and J for email communications that confirmed the respective interview arrangements).

I gained access to the three middle-managers at Central College as a result of former peer-based relationships i.e. two former colleagues at West College (where I am employed) who were now middle-managers at Central College. These two middle-managers are identified by the aliases: Matthew and Harry. Harry was able to further provide me access to Dave at Central College, by providing his college telephone contact number and informing me that he would be happy for me to make contact having briefly discussed my research study with him. (Please refer to Appendix E for their respective job titles, hierarchical middle position and curriculum area of responsibility; please refer to Appendices K, L and M for email communications that confirmed the respective interview arrangements).

I gained access to the three middle-managers at my own college, West College, through an administrator who agreed to act as an agent for my research study. These three middle-managers are identified by the aliases: Amanda, Barbara and Gordon. (Please refer to Appendix E for their respective job titles, hierarchical middle position and curriculum areas of responsibility; please refer to Appendices N, O and P for email communications that confirmed the respective interview arrangements).

All nine middle-managers received copies of the Participant Information Sheet (please see Appendix F) in advance of the interviews taking place; each of them signed the Consent Form (please see Appendix G) to indicate their agreement to allow me to interview them at the time of the actual interview.

Staff in other positions e.g. lecturers and senior managers, while considered for inclusion for interview, as part of the initial research study design, were not actually included within the final research design and implementation. This was so that data collection focused upon the range of middle-management positions – lower, middle and senior – while remaining sensibly within the scope, and manageability, of a professional doctoral study. Moreover, the middle-management positions were researched across three college sites, which provided the means to compare and contrast data generated and collected, and to triangulate analyses; which I
considered advantageous to the study’s design. Such a design might also be considered limiting in the sense that a single college case-study would have allowed the possibility of a more in-depth single context which might have also included senior managers and lecturers who could also have generated data about their understandings of middle-managers’ work. However, these considerations elucidate the problems researchers face in undertaking research endeavours and when drawing any ‘final’ and ‘absolute’ conclusions; that any conclusions are constrained by a study’s design, no matter how well considered and planned.

**Considering the curriculum Middle-manager as ‘the case’**

The sampling is focused on three specific layers of middle-management at the participating institutions; representative of the heterogeneity (Gleeson and Knights 2008; Gleeson and Shain 1999) when considering the FE MM case. Thus, at *Central College*, I interviewed those MMs who carried out pedagogic work as part of their role; who Page (2011a) recognises as ‘First-Tier Managers’. Such MMs are those at the lowest hierarchical level of the middle-layer. Contrastingly, at *West College* I interviewed three senior MMs; those positioned at the highest hierarchical level, have no teaching commitments and directly line-manage curriculum-based middle MMs; middle MMs are considered to be those individuals positioned at the middle-level within the scope of the middle-manager hierarchy and who also do not teach. The senior MMs at *West College* manage whole ‘centres’ which constitute, in most cases, disparate curriculum areas e.g. *Construction* and *Art & Design* or *Childcare, Basic Skills and Public Services*. Finally, at *East College*, I interviewed three middle-level hierarchy MMs; those MMs who are responsible for particular curriculum areas e.g. *Hair and Beauty* or *Public Services*, who directly line-manage teachers and assessors but do not teach themselves.

In adopting a case study approach to researching the MM – i.e. the middle-manager as ‘the case’, while there is a lack of homogeneity acknowledged by published researchers in consideration of them (Gleeson and Knights 2008, Gleeson and Shain 1999), this is accordingly reflected in those MM interview participants within my own study. I propose that through the inclusion of senior, middle and lower MMs this accurately reflects the ‘FE MM case’ and, further, that by selecting them from
specific known layers from within the middle-hierarchy they represent ‘typical instances’ (Denscombe 2003). However, it should not go unmentioned that each of the three MMs within each level were all from the same institution i.e. the three senior, middle, and lower MMs were selected from West, East and Central colleges, respectively. There are strengths in this, in that similarities and differences can be determined in subsequent data analysis from a particular MM level within the same institution and, crucially, how their individual college strategic plan document influences each of their practices in identical and differing ways. In concentrating on typical case instances across the three colleges and then analysing three occurrences of each typical instance (senior, middle or lower, within a single institution), I propose that a coherent and authentic account of the working practices of the curriculum-based FE Middle-manager can be realised. Moreover, each typical instance is subject to the same strategic plan which plausibly provides more analytical coherence than if each instance was subject to strategic plan documents that were differentiated.

In summary, the study’s design of data collection employed non-probability-based purposive expert sampling: I sought a specific defined group – the MM – with known demonstrable experience (i.e. expertise), at particular college sites. The MMs, in terms of their general working practices and scope of responsibility are further considered to be typical instances of the MM case – senior, middle and lower. Furthermore, case-instances included in my sample are reflective of the available published literatures relating to ‘the FE Middle-manager’ (see, for example, Briggs 2006, Gleeson and Knights 2008, Page 2011a, Shain 2000). In terms of particular types of non-probability sampling, there is an element of snowball sampling: at Central College one of the MMs (Harry) was able to put me in contact with another MM (Dave).

In more general terms, there is an element of convenience sampling, in that I selected MMs who were located relatively near to my own domestic and work-related residence. Due to geographical convenience this might be further considered to also be a form of pragmatic sampling (Denscombe 2003). Finally, when considering sampling issues, the small-scale nature of this qualitative study precludes the drawing of conclusions that are intended to be applied generally; the
production of general conclusions is not the purpose of the proposed study but, rather, to illuminate the practices of middle-managers’ in three English FE colleges, how their practices are traceable to their respective strategic plan documents and where more knowledge about their work is needed.

**Interview time-scale and question design**

The nine middle-management interviews took place between February 2012 and May 2013. The interviews were of a semi-structured nature where, although the interview schedule (please see Appendix H) was designed around ten key questions (some of which incorporated sub-questions), where interviewees raised unanticipated though pertinent points to the study, I probed such points further and allowed them to elaborate upon them. The questions I designed in the interview schedule were about: the *specific role* as a middle-manager, how middle-managers understand their own *positioning* in enacting such a role, *organisational* key issues, *government policy* impact upon their work, *the skills required* to do the work of middle-management and issues around *control* relating to their work, as well as work-load. These questions were largely informed by the preceding literature review I undertook: for instance, how Briggs (2005, 2006), from a *functional* perspective, focuses on the *role-aspects* of middle-management work and where, for example, Gleeson and Shain (1999), from a *critical and socially critical* perspective illuminate the ways middle-management *is practised* in the college context, and how middle-managers *position themselves* in relation to other key actors, such as senior managers and teaching staff. Consequently, using such an interview schedule, to frame each of the nine interviews, significantly influenced the themes that emerged within those interview data generated; themes based largely on the specific *role* of the middle-manager, the specific *activities* in which they engaged, and the necessary *relationships, and interactions* with others, required when carrying out their work.

**Analyses of the data generated through the Interview Process**

The theme headings for each of the genealogical analyses within the respective chapters (Five, Six and Seven) arose out of the thematic analysis process I undertook; data were included under each theme heading where, following Yin (2003), themes selected for inclusion *evidenced clear replication* across the three
middle-manager cases. Thus, at West College, for example, all three senior middle-manager cases made reference to privately funded college opportunities relevant to their practices in the form of international or commercial provisions. Hence, there is a theme heading for this (i.e. International and Commercial Provision) in Chapter Seven, but not in chapters Five and Six, as this was not, on the evidence of the interview data generated, part of the middle-managers remit at their particular hierarchical level. Likewise, at East College, each of the middle managers mentioned their affective states related to their working hours and hence is included as a theme-heading (i.e. Working Hours and Affective States), equivalent data not generated by those senior middle-managers at West College; plausibly reflecting the latter’s reluctance to admit to the same sorts of vulnerability as a consequence of their seniority in a large general FE college, a position equivalent, for instance, to an assistant or vice-principal at a smaller FE college, and the fact that I was known to them as a work colleague, employed within the same institution.

I carried out thematic analyses through the process of ‘theme mapping’ once I had transcribed the data from each interview. I adopted a constant comparative method (Thomas 2013). These themes are presented within each chapter (see chapters Five, Six and Seven), under theme headings, which I produced from second-order constructs (see Appendix R for an example of the process), derived from first-stage temporary constructs (see Appendix Q for an example of the process). Each theme is presented through the inclusion of each of the three middle-managers’ voices, from their transcribed interview data, and their specific articulations which contributed to the construction of such themes. As genealogical analysis attends to practices, it is the middle-managers’ practices that provide the analytical focus, as well as those agenda they articulate, around which, their practices are concentrated. I attempted, as far as possible, to give equal voice to each of the middle-manager cases; for example, that each of them contributed data under each constructed theme heading; evidencing replication across each of the cases (Yin 2003).

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18 When transcribed, the three MM cases at West College, East College and Central College generated 20,621 words, 27,201 words and 23,038 words, respectively. The thematic analyses were carried out on these, as three separate bodies of data, focusing on those middle-manager practices articulated within each of them.
The thematic analyses were carried out at each middle-management hierarchical level (lower, middle and senior), drawn from each specific college context (understood mainly through the college strategic plan document), without reference to any data at other middle-management levels, or college context; hence, each analysis is bespoke. However, in carrying out the meta-analysis, which yields the main findings of this study (Chapter Eight), analyses were necessarily undertaken by considering the totality of the data generated by the study, at all hierarchical levels, and draws significantly from those data analysed and presented separately in chapters Five, Six and Seven, as well as data not previously reported but which increased in significance once I was able to triangulate data from each college context and identify similarities across the entirety of the study. Additionally, the meta-analysis also considered the totality of data drawn from the preceding archaeological analyses of college strategic plan documents which, crucially, provide those ‘external conditions’ which influence particular ‘kinds of [middle-management] practices’ (Tamboukou 1999).

**College strategic plan documentary data**

Strategic plan documents and *the statements* inscribed within them (i.e. what I refer to as ‘documentary data’) were chosen for analysis within the study as it is the key institutional policy document found within English FE colleges; colleges which have engaged in strategic planning since *Incorporation* in April 1993:

> The strategic plan has a pivotal role in the management of a college. It is the route map which guides the college in its short and longer-term decisions and provides the setting for the college's operating plans. (Drodge and Cooper 1997, p.29)

Following Briggs (2005) and Page (2011a), who recognise the middle-managers as *implementers of college policy*, this key college policy document was selected (a) due to its significance for the college and its managers (see also O’Connell 2005) and (b), in Foucauldian terms, it contains statements which inscribe those rules and regularities which constitute institutional truths i.e. specific discursive practices at the time of the study, validating particular knowledge(s). Moreover, a key focus of my study is to determine how middle-management *practices* are traceable to such a key policy document.
For the purposes of data collection, accessing each of the college’s SP documents was an uncomplicated process; printed copies of these were made available to me at the time of the first interview at each of the external colleges: by the gatekeeper at East College and the first MM interviewee, Matthew, at Central College. At the college where I was employed, West College, I was actually provided with a copy without reference to this research study; all teaching-staff were provided with a copy at the end of an ‘All staff principal’s meeting’ and asked to familiarise themselves with its contents while, simultaneously, being informed that they would not be expected to know its content in fine detail, nor recollect it spontaneously.

The documentary data are analysed using Kendal and Wickham’s four-stage Foucauldian method whereby a given discursive formation (in this case, the college strategic plan document) is subjected to an analytical process which yields: (i) rules which govern the production of statements, (ii) rules which determine what is considered ‘true’ (and consequently, what counts as ‘false’) (iii) rules which produce new categories of understanding and that facilitate the development of new statements, and (iv) rules that ensure any practice e.g. medical, educational, penal, is both discursive (i.e. determined by inscribed discourse in the form of statements) and material (i.e. carried out through activities, and expressed through individual agency, by social actors e.g. doctors, managers, prison staff).

In its specific discursive formation each college strategic plan is unique. Consequently, while each college’s SP document was subject to the same analytical process, each analysis produces distinctive analytical observations and findings. Furthermore, it is important to emphasise that Foucauldian discourse analysis is not a prescriptive technique, as in forms of Critical Discourse Analysis (for example, see Wodak and Meyer 2009); it is a particular mode of analysis. For additional explanation of the steps please see Archaeological analysis of Strategic Plan documents below – p.66).

The documentary data within the college SP document are linked to those data generated by interviews, within each separate college middle-management chapter
(chapters Five, Six and Seven), by considering the relationship between what each of the middle-managers says, as evinced by their articulations within the individual chapter theme headings, and how these articulations are traceable to their respective college strategic plan document: indicating the extent to which each of them is discursively captured (Gillies 2013). This is carried out in the Discussion section of each of the individual chapters, having presented an archaeological analysis, followed by a genealogical analysis, whereby, only then, is it possible to link the two bodies of data. By linking the two bodies of data, Kendal and Wickham’s fourth stage is executed, in that middle-management material practices i.e. what they do in their work, can be traced, and linked, to the discursive practices of their college strategic plan document i.e. what can be said, and which knowledge is true, within a particular historical period and college context.

**Considering Validity and Reliability**

In assessing the validity and reliability of this research study, I maintain the position that I took in my previous research paper, where I cited Strathern et al.: ‘I aspire, at best, for my research outcomes to evince the realisation of a ‘persuasive fiction’ (Strathern et al. 1987, cited in Fort 2011, p.15); a position corroborated by Foucault:

> I am fully aware that I have never written anything other than fictions. For all that, I would not want to say that they were outside the truth. (Foucault 1979, cited in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983, p.204)

Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983) note that in providing a ‘fictive history’ an analytical mode is provided that respects established problems and concepts, recognising that the interpreter is concerned with ‘something important’, whereby interpretation starts from the current situation, proving a genealogical history without claiming to capture what the past really was (or the present really is) as some form of ‘ultimate reality’.

In light of Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983), I propose that this study is valid: that I am problematizing the middle-manager subject, by seeking to understand their identity and recognising the important contributions they make to the successful operation of the English FE College. That such an endeavour is to illuminate their practices of middle-management; that in writing a genealogy of the middle-manager, those self-evidences of the present might be exposed; crucially, ‘to help detach ourselves from
our truths and seek alternative ways of existence’ (Tamboukou 1999, p.210), particularly in light of those discourses of performativity and managerialism to which I referred at the outset of this thesis, where writers acknowledge their detrimental effects upon those who work within educational settings.

Moreover, in using concepts (i.e. those ideas and statements materially inscribed within their respective college strategic plan documents) as a basis for understanding middle-managers’ work, I further propose that this study is free from specific issues around the truth-claims of those knowledges produced by it. As Gillies writes:

...[a]rchaeology ... is absolutely not concerned with the truth claims of statements, nor even the meaning claims of statements, but merely with the internal rules of formation of a discourse. Foucault is therefore able to bracket off epistemological and ontological problems by focusing on discourse in its materiality (p.33-34).

Similarly, Tamboukou (2006) observes: ‘Knowledge and truth exist but only as they apply to specific situations that the genealogical project sets out to explore in detail’ (p.206).

Finally, in assessing the study’s reliability, I wish to take that position adopted by Guba (1981) who, in distancing himself from the positivist paradigm when considering knowledge and its production, posits the notion of ‘dependability’ (Guba 1981, cited in Shenton 2003); that this study is aligned more closely to the interpretivist paradigm as a consequence of its focus on social practices which are both discursive (where knowledge and truths are constructed) and material (where those knowledges are taken up by social actors and ‘used’ within institutions). Thus, this study ought not to be considered in terms of ‘reliability’ from a positivist stance, which privileges ‘the experiment’ and whether a particular experiment can be replicated reliably, yielding the same ‘results’. Rather, in positing the notion of a research study that is ‘trustworthy’, which prefers the notion of ‘dependability’ (Shenton 2003); expecting any qualitative-based research study to be: reported in detail (what was planned and executed), includes the operational detail of data gathering and whether an effective, and full account of the inquiry has been included (for example, the methods and methodology adopted, the analytical framework for the interpretation of data generated and how any such framework
informs the reporting and write-up of data, as well as future implications of the study), I propose that this thesis, through its structure and detailed explanatory content, meets all such criteria; and hence, can be considered ‘dependable’, contributing to its overall trustworthiness.

**Triangulation**

In considering triangulation which seeks to reduce the effect of investigator bias through the use of *multiple sources of data* (Denscombe 2003, p.38), questions are prompted as to whether the study’s data were collected from different sites, from different informants and utilised different methods. In addressing such questions: the research study draws upon data from three separate college contexts, from nine-middle-manager cases, at three distinct middle-management levels (senior, middle and lower) and uses three distinctive strategic plan documents. Moreover, in drawing upon those relevant published literatures to contextualise the study (e.g. Briggs 2005, Gleeson and Shain 1999, Page 2011a), as well as when comparing the study’s findings in consideration of these earlier works, triangulation is ensured by considering those data, as reported, from these critical studies about FE middle-management work. Moreover, the findings of this study are further considered in relation to those publications and studies drawn from the wider education field (Ball 2014, Gunter 2012, Ozga 2009) - please see Chapter Nine. In outlining all these sources of data, both primary and secondary, I propose that, when considering triangulation, this study’s design and operationalization is authentically robust.

**Ethics**

As Blaxter *et al.* (2001) state: ‘The conduct of ethically informed social research should be the goal of all social researchers’ (p.158). Consequently, my research proposal was submitted for scrutiny by the University of Manchester’s Research Ethics committee in order to design and implement an ethically robust research study. The research project was assessed using the School of Education RREA form and it was assessed as ‘medium risk’ because it required face-to-face contact with interview participants outside normal working hours and required me to travel to unfamiliar locations.
Prior to scheduled interviews, all interviewees were provided with the research rationale, where important ethical aspects such as anonymity were highlighted: that no individual would be identifiable from my thesis and that all names will be changed, including institution names. Furthermore, I made clear that any transcribed recordings would only be seen by me (and, if required, my research supervisor, Professor Helen Gunter); that any recordings would be destroyed once my thesis had been examined. Similarly, I informed the participants that those strategic plan documents provided by their colleges were to be subsequently amended so that any identifying titles were removed.

At the time of each interview, interviewees were asked to read and confirm that they had read pertinently-related documentation i.e. the ‘Participant Information Sheet’ (Appendix F) which explained necessary ethical issues, and interviewees were asked to sign the Consent Form (Appendix G) to signify their agreement to participate voluntarily.

**Locating the researcher within the study**

In carrying out the proposed study I realised that I needed to balance the demands of my employing institution as they arose in the course of my work as a full-time lecturer, as well as those which were influenced by the planned programme in my identity as researcher. Consequently, it was essential when working as an ‘insider-outsider’¹⁹ (Dwyer and Buckle 2009) that I maintained an appropriate balance between the two identities. I intended to account for such a balance by ensuring that any research activities e.g. MM interviews, were planned to coincide with potentially less fraught periods of teaching-related work. Moreover, I planned these as far in advance as was reasonable to ensure time had been ‘set aside’ in preparation for my identity as a researcher. Additionally, I was aware that I was privy, on occasion, within my own college, to information arising from the micro-politics of the organisation, for instance, a period of staff turnover and/or

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¹⁹ As a doctoral student carrying out research, I considered that I held insider and outside status in the following ways: when conducting research within my own college I am an insider-researcher as I am employed at the college, though I am also an outsider in terms of the research subject (as I am a teacher and not a middle-manager). I am an outsider when conducting research at external colleges as I am not a middle-manager and also work outside these organisations, though can be considered an insider, as a teacher employed within the FE sector.
management restructure and that such events often permeate organisational life through various means e.g. staffroom gossip.

However, these considerations did not affect the design of my interview questions or the use of institutional policy documents, as these were considered in the context of the planned programme and, importantly, in advance of institutional vicissitudes. Nevertheless, it is necessary to acknowledge these issues explicitly to demonstrate my awareness of them, and their potential, if I am insufficiently circumspect, for unduly influencing aspects of the research.

Considering my identity as an ‘outsider’, while researching the two external colleges, I was freed from many of those aspects deemed apposite at my own college, as identified above. However, there are two specific considerations worthy of mention. Firstly, while I may not have been privy to internal organisational micro-politics at the two external colleges there may well have been similar disruptive events in train, of which I was not aware. Thus, it was important that I was sensitive to these possibilities and therefore I deemed it essential to ensure that I met any middle-managers in accordance with pre-arranged appointments; minimising any disruption to their own busy schedule, as well as ensuring that I did not compromise the position of the institutional gatekeeper by being unreliable in any way. I propose that this was achieved. Secondly, as I had worked at my own institution for 20 years it is inevitable that I have developed a particular understanding of Further Education institutions. It was important that I attempted to remain open-minded in any dealings with external colleges and did not bring, as far as is possible, my own contextualised experiences to bear. As an outsider-researcher only the gatekeepers knew my alternative identity as a college lecturer; any other people with whom I had contact were only aware that I was a researcher undertaking research for a doctoral programme at the University of Manchester.

However, as Thomson and Gunter (2011) observe: ‘the terminology of inside and outside research identities … promotes an illusion of stability’ (p.27); that, as researcher endeavours and ‘identification practices’ (p.28) are mediated by different actors and social situations, it is more useful, indeed more realistic, to consider research identities as fluid; and that the inevitable messiness of research, ethically,
demands a constant evaluation and awareness of shifting identity, both during, after and prior to research activity with key participants: ‘[with] little chance of ever being brought to permanent and satisfactory completion’ (Baumann 2004, cited in Thomson and Gunter 2011, p.28).

**Conceptualising the Study - Thinking with Foucauldian Archaeology and Genealogy**

As I outlined at the close of Chapter Three, where I carried out a literature review, it is through the deployment of Foucault’s tools of archaeology and genealogy that my research study intends to conceptualise the empirical data captured in both middle-manager interviews and college strategic plan documents. In this section I explain how Foucault’s tools of archaeology and genealogy allow such conceptualisations, facilitating the formulation of an understanding of the curriculum-based FE middle-manager within the site of the Further Education College.

Mennicken and Miller (2012) observe that those research studies in the field of accounting, inspired by Foucault, which have made distinctive contributions to the ways economic life is understood, have done so by:

...[p]osing “how”-type questions with regard to the economic domain, and all the attempts made to shape the conduct of the individuals and groups that make it up. In asking not “why” but “how,” there has emerged a nuanced and differentiated understanding of the multiple processes and calculative practices that populate the socio-economic domain. (p.18)

In providing a rationale for the practical application of Foucauldian conceptualisations within my own study, Ball (2013) makes the point that Foucault expressed frustration that so much effort was made in his lifetime, by others, in expending their energies on semantic aspects of his *oeuvre* rather than engaging in ‘the sort of practical analytical work that he advocated so vigorously.’ (p.18) [Emphases added]

The above citation usefully captures both *the focus* and *modality* of archaeology and genealogy for my own research project: firstly, in emphasising the ‘how’ of educational arrangements: *The Order of Things* (Foucault 1966); as well as, secondly, the ways in which archaeology and genealogy can be deployed as *practical analytic tools*. It is through their use as practical analytic tools, that I intend to make evident
the ‘how’ of the further education domain, with a specific emphasis on the curriculum-based middle-manager subject: how Further Education is organised, structured and practiced; the ways in which particular knowledges are institutionally produced, and how these knowledges relate to wider regimes of truth such as neoliberalism, in the form of government education policy, and those contemporaneous policies to which they connect and are imbricated and, still further, how the recognisable subject-position of the middle-manager is implicated within such regimes of knowledge: within the context of the English FE college, the wider neoliberal domain in which FE is actualized, and at their nexus; subject to and agential in a network of discursive practices.

Archaeology is able to facilitate the ‘how’ of Further Education by simply examining the multiple and varied surfaces of emergence, upon which, FE has come to be represented and practiced in the present. One such surface of emergence is the ‘FE middle-manager’ who, as a particular subject-position, is a relatively recent phenomenon, appearing (becoming visible), at the same time as feudal-like baronial department heads (Simmons 2008), prevalent during the era of local authority control, began to disappear.

Another such surface of emergence is the institutional strategic plan document which not only evidences statements about institutional intentions but, in their specific formulation, a particular practice is realised i.e. strategic planning; a practice taken up by particular subject-positions, and not others, that implies specific institutional power-relations. Notably, Kendall and Wickham (1999) observe that Foucauldian statements and visibilities mutually condition one another; thus, just as the prison, as a form of visibility, produces statements about criminality, likewise, the middle-manager, visibly discernible and physically embodied, produces statements about the power and social arrangements of FE institutions.

Turning to consider genealogy, Tamboukou (1999) observes that Foucault’s genealogies pose the question of ‘which kinds of practices tied to which kinds of external conditions determine the different knowledges in which we ourselves figure.’ (p.201) [Emphases added] In doing so, she not only reveals genealogy’s

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20 Statements are the basic building block of Foucault’s Discursive Formations which are fundamental to his archaeological ‘method’ (Foucault 1969, The Archaeology of Knowledge)
target i.e. practices but, significantly, directly links these practices to the external conditions which inform them. Furthermore, Tamboukou asserts, that when considering the ways in which both practices and external conditions enmesh, particular kinds of knowledge are produced in which ‘we’ i.e. specific subject-positions (e.g. middle-managers, teachers and learners) are implicated. Thus, archaeology and genealogy are complementary; discerning that which is visible in the form of statements which, crucially, can be subjected to different levels of analysis (e.g. an institutional strategic plan contains statements, each of which can be analysed archaeologically) and how these statements inform, and give rise to, certain kinds of practices; practices which serve to animate statements through those implications immanent in the latter.

Importantly, emphasising the freedoms implicit within power-relations, Ball (2013) comments that Foucault’s ‘free subject’ coexists necessarily with forms of knowledge that should be considered in strategic terms, rather than as abstract ahistorical truths, an observation which can be traced to the Archaeology of Knowledge, where Foucault (1969) writes about the ways in which statements ‘are institutionalized, received, used, re-used, combined together … become objects of appropriation, instruments for desire or interest, elements for a strategy.’ (p.129) [Emphases added]

In deploying archaeology and genealogy, their focus are those institutional strategic plan documents of each of the three colleges, and the practices made evident via middle-manager interview data, respectively. Critical to understanding their middle-management practices are the rationales they provide which support and give rise to them. Sir Bernard O’Connell, author of Creating an Outstanding College, recognises that the strategic plan formulated and implemented at his own institution:

…[a]cted as a vehicle for vision-building, developing consensus about goals, translating these into tangible, ambitious but feasible objectives, targets and strategies, and that enabled college-level aspirations to be cascaded into aligned team and individual goals. (O’Connell 2005)

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21 The institutional strategic plan also exists at the level of the statement (though one stage removed from those statements contained within them) and can be subjected to archaeological analysis in relation to other statements at the same level e.g. management guideline documents and so forth.

22 Sir Bernard O’Connell previously held the post of principal at Runshaw College, Lancashire.
Consequently, the inscribed institutional strategic plan, as evidenced in O’Connell’s description, announces statements about the institution that constructs a regime of truth through a ‘limited system of presences’ (Foucault 1969, p. 134). Moreover, in Mennicken and Miller’s (2012) terms, the institutional strategic plan is a ‘territorializing instrument’ which renders subjects governable. It is these limited presences that are subject to archaeological analysis in this study. However, it is not an analysis of discourse in the generally understood sense²³, but an analysis of the arrangement and the relation between statements²⁴, and the strategies they create. Such statements are understood within their arrangement, not as statements which announce absolute abstract truths, but as peculiar to the particular discursive formation in which they inhere; and which have prescriptive effects regarding what is to be done - effects of ‘jurisdiction’; as well as prescriptive effects regarding what is to be known - effects of ‘veridiction’ (Foucault 1994). Thus, unlike Fairclough’s ‘Dialectical-Relationship Approach’ to Critical Discourse Analysis (see Wodak and Meyer 2009) that takes ‘a rather grand-theory-oriented position’ [whereby] Fairclough focuses upon social conflict in the Marxian tradition and tries to detect its linguistic manifestations in discourse’ (Wodak and Meyer 2009, p. 27) [Emphases added], Foucauldian archaeological analysis rejects the search for ‘deeper reality’ behind or beneath discourses’ (Kendall and Wickham 1999, p. 45) ‘remain[ing] at the level of appearances’ (p. 26). As Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983) explain: ‘To situate the statement the archaeologist need only accept it at face value and place it in its actual context of other surface statements’ (p. 46) [Emphases added]. Indeed, Graham (2011) observes:

Unlike Critical Discourse Analysis or CDA (Fairclough 2003; van Dijk 2001), discourse analysis using Foucault focuses less on the micro - the structural/grammatical/linguistic/semiotic features that make up the text - and more on the macro (Threadgold 2003); that is, what is “made up” by the text itself. (p. 671) [Original emphases]

Genealogy shares much of the same mode of analysis as archaeology, but rather than a focus on statements, it attends to actions in the form of practices; in this study, the practices of the middle-manager subject. Thus, in terms of data, I will be

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²³ Archaeology is a particular mode of analysis rather than a prescriptive technique
²⁴ Statements, in Foucauldian terms, can also inscribe concepts, objects of knowledge, as well as subject-positions
reliant on those actions and rationales articulated by middle-managers in the relating of their occupational practices where the analysis arrived at will account for the constitution of the middle-manager subject within their particular historical framework (Gordon 1999).

**Data Analysis**

The application of my methodology that enables the analysis of both documentary college strategic plan data using *Foucauldian archaeology*, as well as middle-manager case interview data using *Foucauldian genealogy*, is explained in the two subsections which follow.

**Archaeological analysis of Strategic Plan documents**

In the analysis of Strategic Plan documents I deploy Kendal and Wickham’s (1999) Foucauldian ‘method’ whereby each of the college’s SP documents I recognise as ‘a corpus of “statements” whose organisation is regular and systematic’ (p.42). Through the Foucauldian notion that discourses are systematically organised, consequently, ‘discourses have rules’ (p.42). Advancing ‘rule identification’ as a key process when undertaking archaeological analysis, Kendal and Wickham (1999) propose that four specific rule types within a particular discursive formation can be found:

1. **Rules for the production of statements**
   These are rules which govern the production of statements. For example, Strategic Plan documents are expected to be concise and directive; as are the statements inscribed within them.

2. **Rules that delimit the sayable**
   These are rules which place limitations on what qualifies as true, as well as false. For example, ‘scientific’ psychiatric discourse disallows statements based on magic or witchcraft. Or, in understandings about educational outcomes, these are understood and specified in numerical terms; specifically expressed *data-metrics*. 
3. Rules that create spaces in which new statements can be made

These are rules which produce new categories of understanding and how their novelty emphasises how particular understandings are based on ‘quite public apparatuses like schools, hospitals and prisons, not on some private operations of “great minds”’ (Kendal and Wickham 1999, p.45). For example, the novelty (at the time) of ‘idiots’ and ‘lunatics’ as a direct consequence of discourses of abnormality and specific English legislation (see Ball 2013). And, more relevant to this doctoral study, the emergence of the ontological subject ‘the learner’ as a consequence of government enunciations around the funding of learning and learner entitlements.

Critical to such rule-based analyses is how particular ‘rules and regularities’ can be traced to wider discourses, such as government funding regimes and policy document statements. For example, how the emergence of the discursive object ‘learner’, within college SP documents, can be traced to wider discursive regimes; inscribed, for instance, within government education policy documents and funding regimes. Consequently, and having identified, via archaeological analysis, specific rules and regularities which simultaneously delimit and allow particular possibilities of knowledge, such rules and regularities can be further considered when carrying out the genealogical analytical stage (see next section); influencing what people say and do (in their practices) and the rationales they provide for them; how individual agency can be understood within particular ‘conditions of possibility’; where ‘the class of sentences that can be uttered in a specified time and place is not determined by the conscious wishes of the speakers’ (Hacking 2002, p.79).

4. Rules that ensure practices are both material and discursive at the same time.

This step within Foucauldian analysis prompts not archaeological analysis of documents, but those genealogical analyses of material practices, and which subsequently show that material practices are linked to those discursive rules and regularities evinced by archaeology. This analytical step seeks to evidence that, for example, prison practices are about discourses such as penology and criminology and prison life, just as sexual practices are also
about discourses of sexology and psychology and the materiality of sex and sexual activity (Kendall and Wickham 1999). In educational terms, teaching practices are discursive and material: there are pedagogic discourses and pedagogic practices; just as, for middle-managers there are management discourses and management practices. For the purposes of this study, this stage is rendered through genealogical analysis.

**Genealogical analysis of the Middle-manager case interview data**

In using Foucauldian genealogy to analyse MM interview data its justification, as explained above that, to formulate understandings of middle-manager identity, while attention must be given to the discursive rules and regularities which yield specific knowledges that inform their work, it is necessary to carry out an analysis of their practices and, crucially, the rationales they articulate in engaging in these practices, such that middle-management identity is informed, and recognised, by what they do; accounts about their work, without which, render any identity incomplete. Moreover, in providing their rationales at this specific analytical stage, analysis of middle-manager rationales afford opportunities to relate them to those discursive rules and regularities evinced through archaeology, and which demonstrates Kendal and Wickham’s (1999) observation that practices are both discursive and material; discursive practices informing material practices; material practices evincing how rules and regularities are ‘received, used, re-used, combined together … become objects of appropriation, instruments for desire or interest, elements for a strategy.’ (Foucault 1969, p.129)

As Tamboukou (1999) observes:

> Foucault’s genealogies pose the question of which kinds of practices tied to which kinds of external conditions determine the different knowledges in which we ourselves figure. (p.202) [Emphases added]

She further notes that an aim of genealogical analysis is: ‘to strip away the veils that cover people's practices, by simply showing how they are, and where they come from’ (p.209); urging us to consider ‘what is this ‘now’ within which all of us find ourselves?’ (p.202)
**Summary**

In summary, the research study draws upon documentary data, in the form of college strategic plan documents, as well as middle-manager interview data to render middle-management identity. By making use of Foucauldian archaeology and genealogy, the analytical framework explained above, in the following three chapters, is deployed in order to make clear specific institutional knowledge and truths within particular college contexts, and how middle-management practices are traceable to such knowledge and truths. Having analysed particular middle-management layers: middle, lower and senior at *East College*, *Central College* and *West College*, respectively, a meta-analysis is carried out which yields the main findings of the study in *Chapter Eight*. 
Chapter Five

The Curriculum Middle-manager: Three cases at East College

Introduction

In the following data analysis chapter I undertake an archaeological analysis of East College’s Strategic Plan, followed by a genealogical analysis of middle-manager semi-structured interview data. In the archaeological analysis I pay particular attention to the ontological referent ‘learner’, given its pervasiveness within the college’s plan, and the ways in which it is conjoined with referents such as ‘employability’ and ‘employment’ in material statements. Using Kendall and Wickham’s (1999) Foucauldian ‘method’, I propose that while East College places a specific emphasis on ‘the learner’, it privileges particular data-metrics, in the form of ‘success rates’, which measure entire learner cohorts, when accounting for the quality of its provision.

Moving next, to a genealogical analysis where, through an analysis of semi-structured interview data, I show some of the consistent foci of middle-management practice e.g. the importance of data-metrics in FE middle-managers’ work, as well as illuminating their practices more generally, I go on to discuss the ways the three middle-manager cases use the referent ‘learner’ in the course of their work; a referent which, I argue, conceals its duplicity: that while the referent ‘learner’ is ubiquitous when middle-managers speak about their practice: in managing teaching staff, reporting to senior management, and when dealing with learners themselves, its historical ontology can be traced to government policy documents; bound up in statements concerned with FE funding formulae methodology. Hence, in constituting the curriculum-based middle-manager subject, I propose that caution should be exercised in affording primacy to middle-manager identity around ‘the learner’ (as understood, for instance, as synonymous with the term ‘student’), and that ‘the learner’ might be more properly considered as a proxy for data: a disaggregated component of learner cohort success rates.

Archaeological analysis of Strategic Plan document

The focus of my analysis of East College’s strategic plan document is ‘the learner’ (and its correlates ‘learners’ and ‘learning’) which exists in the college’s over-arching
Mission statement: ‘Inspiring learners to succeed in life and work’. This is appropriate given that the three middle-managers interviewed at East College are responsible for learning provision in terms of those curriculum areas that they manage (as opposed to those middle-managers related to service functions, such as Estates, that are not included within this research study).

The ‘learner’ and the discursive formation of East College’s Strategic Plan

Foucault remarks:

...[w]hat properly belongs to a discursive formation and what makes it possible to delimit the group of concepts, disparate as they may be, that are specific to it, is the way in which these different elements are related to one another. (Foucault 1969, p.66)

In proceeding, then, how is the term ‘learner’, or its plural ‘learners’, expressed; and in relation to what other elements, as materially inscribed, within the discursive formation of the strategic plan?

Firstly, my archaeological analysis starts from a broad perspective, progressively moving to the more specific. Please refer to East College’s strategic plan extract (Appendix B – Figure 1).

Within the 280 words extracted from the total 804 words contained in East College’s Strategic Plan document (see Appendix B - Figure 1) the word ‘learner’ (and its correlates: ‘learning’ and ‘learners’) occurs 23 times and is present in all five of the Mission Delivery statements. Furthermore, it is a central element in the first statement of the college’s stated ‘Vision’; where the college announces its intention to become an ‘Outstanding’ provider. Additionally, the referent exists in all five of its broadly stated Strategic Objectives relevant to the college’s forthcoming three year period as relates to ‘Quality of Provision’, as well as being inscribed within all of the ‘Key Milestones’ which quantify each of the broadly expressed Strategic Objectives in more specific and measurable terms. While this may not be a particularly remarkable observation given that the organisation is an FE college, the repeated use of the terms ‘learners’ and ‘learning’ is clearly apparent (by way of making such an observation more significant, the Strategic Plan uses the referent ‘student’ only

25 The extracted Strategic Plan elements relate exclusively to curriculum-focused aspects as my research study focuses on curriculum-based Middle-managers.
twice, though not in relation to Quality of Provision; the referent ‘education’ is used once and is conjoined to yield ‘vocational education’). Thus, a specific object of discourse, ‘the learner’ (which can also be considered a particular subject-position, in Foucauldian terms), and practice, ‘learning’, is materially inscribed within a particular domain; the domain being that which Foucault (1969) recognises as a surface of emergence: ‘places within which objects are designated and acted upon’ (Kendall and Wickham 1999, p.26): in this case, the further education institution.

Moving to consider how particular elements are ‘used, re-used, [and] combined together’ (Foucault 1969, p.129), it is evident that ‘the learner’ and its correlates (e.g. ‘learners’ and ‘learning’) are conjoined with ‘employment’ and the latter’s correlates (e.g. ‘work’, ‘employers’ and ‘employability’) as evidenced in the Strategic Plan document extracts (see Appendix B.1 - Figure 2).

Archaeological analysis – rule identification

This section examines some of the rules which can be recognised as a consequence of the configuration of a given discursive formation and develops those analyses above which specifically relate to East College’s Strategic Plan.

1. The identification of rules for the production of statements

In considering the materiality of East College’s Strategic Plan it is evident that those statements inscribed within it are concise. Moreover, the document itself is short: encapsulating the institution’s strategic plan within three A4 size pages. Thus, in identifying rules for the production of statements, it is evident that the strategic plan is necessarily brief and its statements are expected to be concise

26 Turning to the actual material content, the key subject-position around which the plan is focused, ontologically, is ‘the learner’

27 Moreover, ‘the learner’, and ‘learning’, are related within statements and in close proximity to other statements which use the referent ‘employment’, and correlates such as ‘employability’ and ‘work’ (see Appendix B.1 - Figure 2). Thus, in producing statements about ‘learning’ and the ‘learner’, a rule can be discerned: the activity of ‘learning’ is for a specific purpose; a

26 This is made further evident when accounting for the SP documents of West and Central Colleges.
27 Within recent FE legislation, the referent ‘learner’ is not inscribed within the Education and Skills Act 2008, the referent ‘pupil’ and ‘student’ being repeatedly inscribed, but it appears in the more recent Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.
purpose suggested by its repeated conjoining within discrete and adjacent statements to other referents, such as ‘employability’ and ‘work’. Lastly, in considering the college’s ‘Quality of Provision’ and how the institution, as well as interested external parties, are able to assess and formulate understandings of its ‘Quality’, a rule can be identified which makes clear that such any understandings are to be primarily understood through *data-metrics; data-metrics* which yield aggregated scores for entire learner cohorts e.g. ‘16-18 Long Course Learner Success Rates are to be 82% or above.’

2. Rules that delimit the sayable

In elaborating the analysis of the first rule type, having identified a rule for the production of Strategic Plan statements (i.e. that they are concise) it is evident that the Strategic Plan does not incorporate aspects which are, by definition, problematic, or that necessitate discussion. Thus, a specific *genre* is invoked; a *genre*, understood in Fairclough’s (2000) terms, as a particular mode of language which contributes to the governing process: ‘how it achieves consent, for instance’ (p.14). Thus, strategic plans are presented as, and simultaneously present, the unproblematic; consequently, contestation is marginalised (or still further, does not exist). Secondly, through the ontologically-realised ‘learner’ (and its correlate – ‘learn-ing’) a particular active disposition is imbued in this referent; an active disposition understood yet more purposefully with its repeated association with ‘employment’ and the latter’s correlates (e.g. ‘employability’ and ‘industry-standard vocational skills’). Thus, in foregrounding the learner, and learn-ing, with the stated Mission of increasing ‘the employability of all learners’ (Mission delivery statement two) [Emphasis added] attributes that may be of particular significance to individuals and their specific circumstances are overlooked (e.g. a person identified as ‘autistic’ or ‘disadvantaged’). That is not to say that these would not become apparent to some of the institution’s members at a later point (e.g. classroom teachers); but in publically announcing, through its strategic plan, how the institution elects to present itself, internally and externally, individuals enrolled onto learning

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28 Success rates are calculated by multiplying retention rates and achievement rates. For instance if a cohort of learners has a retention of 80% and achievement of 80% (0.8 x 0.8) x 100, this would show a success rate of 64% (0.64). ([http://archive.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=improvingsuccess](http://archive.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=improvingsuccess), Access date: August 6, 2013)
programmes are realised in their uniformity: the ontology of the learner\textsuperscript{29} hollowing out pertinent existential attributes of individuals; marginalising heterogeneity.

Lastly, in recognising the ‘Quality of its Provision’, the institution understands such quality in very specific ways: through aggregated data-metrics calculated on the basis of entire cohorts of learners enrolled onto specific learning programmes. Moreover, the specific data-metrics calculated (in terms of their actual quantitative value) used in the SP Document are likely to be informed by the institution’s stated Vision to become an ‘Outstanding’ provider. Consequently, it would not be acceptable for Learner Success Rates to be below those expected benchmarks stated, as such data-metrics would jeopardise the institution’s inscribed Vision. Thus, in considering what else might be significant in determining the ‘Quality of Provision’ e.g. interesting and engaging learning sessions, and how such aspects are measured, while qualitative feedback is likely to be sought from learners e.g. through on-line learner surveys which might indicate these and other relevant aspects, it is not evident how the Strategic Plan is able to explicitly account for them, if at all; certainly when considering both the foregrounding and privileging of data-metrics and the hierarchical arrangement of particular statements (see Appendix B - Figure 1.).

3. Rules that create spaces in which new statements can be made

This stage of analysis concentrates on the novelty of new statements: ‘the way they invent new forms of person, like the mentally ill and the criminal’ (Kendall and Wickham 1999, p.45). In doing so, Kendall and Wickham (1999) assert, that such inventiveness is derived, discernibly, from public apparatuses, like schools and prisons, rather than the ‘private operations of “great minds”’ (p.45).

Consequently, having drawn particular attention to the referent ‘learner’, within East College’s Strategic Plan, it might reasonably be asked: ‘From where does this new form of person (subject-position) originate?’ (And can it, plausibly, be considered ‘new’?)

\textsuperscript{29} Ontologically, the learner arguably only exists as the learner in the particular domain of educational institutions (which makes little sense outside of its specific domain).
Finlay et al. (2007) observe that, in recent years, ‘education’, as a term, has been almost completely excluded from documents relating to post-compulsory education, and the phrase ‘learning and skills’ substituted in its place. They claim that ‘learning’ is conceived of, within government texts, as an individual activity, whereas ‘education’ is a conceived of as a collective activity which burdens national governments. Their interpretation, they argue, is supported by statements contained within government documents expressed in such ways as: ‘putting learners at the heart of the system’ (Finlay et al. 2007, p.141) that imply a clear focus on recipients of services, rather than providers. 30 Indeed, these observations are substantiated when perusing very recent government policy documents where the referent ‘learner’ appears 65 times 31 and replicates the statement they foreground almost identically: ‘Learners are at the heart of the FE and skills system’ (BIS 2011, p.5).

Thus, in Foucauldian terms, East College, in making institutional pronouncements in the form of their Strategic Plan, evince Kendall and Wickham’s (1999) stage where spaces for new statements are made, as a particular consequence of the referent ‘learner’ appearing within government discourse: i.e. within FE reform policy documents (BIS 2011, DfE 2011) and Parliamentary Acts (Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009). Hence, statements appear, within East College’s Strategic Plan, where the referent ‘learner’ is literally ‘at the heart’ of all that the institution does, or seeks to do, as inscribed in its Mission statement, in all of its Mission Delivery statements, in all of its Strategic Objective and Key Milestones statements related to ‘Quality of Provision’; replicating the pervasiveness of ‘the learner’ within government discourse. Moreover, in seeking to recognise not only new forms of person, but the practices related to them, it is evident that ‘the learner’ is inscribed at the heart of ‘the skills system’ (BIS 2011) and not, merely, the ‘system’ (see Finlay et al above), creating possibilities for new statements within

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30 Moreover, they argue that in the shift of emphasis to ‘learning’ rather than ‘education’, New Labour continued ‘the modernization project’ (p.141) started by the Conservatives which, they propose, deliberately sought to remove power from education professionals towards central government.

31 The referent ‘skills’ is inscribed 140 times, and the stem referent ‘employ-’ (with suffixes that create correlates such as ‘employer’, ‘employee’, ‘employability’) is inscribed 95 times in the same document.
East College’s plan for the repeated conjoining of the learner to ‘employability’ and its correlates (see Appendix B.1 - Figure 2), as materially evidenced.

**Genealogical analysis of Middle-Manager as the case at East College**

The data that follow are drawn from semi-structured interview questions which asked the three middle-manager cases about their role at East College and the key activities they carried out. Following thematic analyses, the interview data are grouped under theme headings, namely: The Role, followed by six further themes which arose out of the three middle-management interviews: Data-metrics, Meetings and Project Groups, Responding to Ad-hoc and Unexpected Interruptions, Responding to Government Policy, Managing Teaching Staff, and Working Hours and Affective States. The particular layer they occupy within the ‘thick layer’ of FE middle-management (Coffield 2012) is *middle* middle-management (see Appendix S); their particular reporting structure is illustrated in Appendix S1.

**The Role**

The following interview data indicates how the three middle-managers understand their role at East College:

*Louise:* My role is to run the department and to support the staff to deliver outstanding teaching and learning and success, for all our learners. And that’s it!

*Monica:* The role is sort of mediating, organising and planning. It’s situated between senior management, my colleagues, the staff, and also the learners. I have a vast role of understanding and responding to everybody’s needs, as opposed to just the learners; it’s the whole organisational needs.

*Nigel:* My role is to make sure that best practice is implemented throughout the department. Making sure lessons start on time, finish on time, that there’s a range of different assessment methods and that teachers are differentiating across levels. I’m very much focused on teaching and learning.

While *Louise* and *Monica* had both taught at East College for a considerable number of years prior to their promotion to middle-management roles, *Nigel* had only been in post for around six months having worked as a manager in other Further Education colleges. In understanding his role he recognised that he was tasked with
a particular remit having been appointed at East College as a consequence of his specific employment history of working at institutions which he described as ‘Grade One colleges’. In drawing comparisons between the three middle-manager cases, Nigel was alone in explicitly mentioning his interest in particular pedagogic practices; Monica does mention teaching and learning but relates it to the production of specific data-metrics, in the form of ‘achievement’, when asked about what she considered were predominant organisational themes:

*Monica:* I would say teaching and learning as in achievement, that’s the biggest impact. [Emphases added]

*Louise:* Well the predominant theme is success. Everything we do is about success. It’s about success rates, it’s about the learner coming here, staying with us and achieving. That’s how simple it is.

Nigel expresses a similar view, though he specifically mentions ‘Outstanding’; the qualitative descriptor that accompanies the Ofsted Grade One quantitative measure:

*Nigel:* The learner is central to everything we do. We want high success rates and we want to be ‘Outstanding’.

Hence, the three middle-managers understand their institution’s themes in very specific ways: ‘achievement’ and ‘success’ (and associated ‘achievement’ and ‘success’ rates) as well as the desire to be an ‘Outstanding’ provider.

**Data-metrics**

In terms of middle-management activities, all three middle-managers mentioned the importance of data-metrics and the specific working practices associated with them.

*Monica:* The key activities focus on retention and achievement.

Everything we do is around that.

Indeed, Louise, mentions how she is often diverted from activities she has planned for her working day as a consequence of senior management exigencies related to data-metrics:

*Louise:* The Assistant Principal wants to chase a certain data drill-down. So I have to get the data, make sure it’s right; it’s updated, before I can give it to him.
Similarly, Nigel evinces the significance of data-metrics:

_Nigel:_ When you’ve got an 11 per cent difference between the top and bottom course in your area - what’s going well in that course? What can you take from the people in your department who are performing at the top eight per cent in the country? I spend a lot of time doing things like that.

Hence, Monica’s utterance about ‘everything we do is around that’; ‘that’ being a reference to achievement and retention metrics (whose product yields institutional success rates), is corroborated by Nigel when his ‘that’ is about reducing data metric differentials between higher and lower performing courses; while, Louise, when talking in terms of ‘chasing a particular drill-down’, she suggests, not only the urgency afforded to such activity but articulates those particular objects which are institutionally recognised: ‘a particular drill-down’; objects that are ontologically realised through particular institutional practices i.e. drill-ing down.

**Meetings and Project Groups**

All three middle-managers mentioned their attendance at different meetings as well as participation in cross-college project initiatives.

_Monica:_ We’ve got a lot of project groups, looking at different areas and how we can improve things. I’m on seven of those and they do take up a lot of time.

_Nigel:_ I have a number of meetings that I attend and contribute to, as well as project groups: the Raising Success Rates Project group, the Value-Added Project group and the Quality Project group.

_Louise:_ I’m often pulled in different directions by senior management; getting involved in projects, and different things. I’m also part of the Quality Management team, and I support the college’s Quality Assurance processes. I often think the senior managers don’t know all the different things they ask us to do.

Consequently, the three middle-managers, by articulating senior management demands, whereby they are expected to be involved in a wide expanse of

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32 ‘Success’ is calculated by multiplying Achievement by Retention (The number of learners who achieved their qualification multiplied by the number of learners still on the programme at the programme end).
institutional initiatives, indicates the pivotal role they are required to play in the college context.

**Managing Interruptions and Ad-hoc demands**

All three middle-managers mentioned the variety of demands placed upon them which meant their plans were often diverted from those originally intended at the day’s start.

*Louise*: I had a Safeguarding issue\(^\text{33}\) that came through the door on Tuesday. Then the Vice-principal wants his data, he wants it yesterday. My boss, the Assistant Principal wants me to go to a meeting for her.

*Monica*: It might be members of staff coming to my door. Or like yesterday, a Training Officer came to me and said: ‘I’ve been waiting for some certification paperwork\(^\text{34}\). I’ve sent three emails and I still haven’t got it.’ So I had to deal with that.

*Nigel*: One of the things about being in this position is that no day ever runs without its problems. Rarely do I go to work and end up doing what I thought I was going to be doing.

Consequently, all three middle-managers recognised the need to set aside their own planned activities to respond to pressing matters which arose from both senior management and staff during the working day.

**Responding to Government policy**

All three middle-managers mentioned how their role is affected as a consequence of government policy change. *Louise* speaks in terms of how the college introduced a system of ‘self-declaration’ to ensure sufficient enrolments for ESOL\(^\text{35}\) courses, while *Monica* articulates how cuts in central government funding meant the work of three middle-managers became subsumed within her single middle-management post.

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\(^{33}\) Since 2002, FE colleges are required to carry out duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of young people (aged 14-18) following statutory guidance by the Department for Education issued under Section 175 of the Education Act 2002 (DfE 2014).

\(^{34}\) Certification paperwork is accreditation achieved in the workplace, such as National Vocational Qualifications, assessed by college Assessor/Trainers and where college staff must ensure the Work-based Learner receives timely certification in recognition of their programme completion.

\(^{35}\) ESOL – English for Speakers of Other Languages (http://www.aoc.co.uk/en/about_colleges/further_education_glossary.cfm/order/E, Access Date: August 9, 2013)
Finally, *Nigel* understands government policy to be clearly mediated via senior management.

*Louise:* ESOL out in the community, the ladies who come are unwaged dependants and aren’t in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance; they now have to pay. So last year the college brought in something that said - if you sign to say that after this course you’re going to look for work, it’s a self-declaration - we’ll take that and we’ll say no more.

*Monica:* I think it’s always a case of more-for-less. We had a restructure last year so my job role is what three people previously did.

*Nigel:* If you’re asking: ‘Am I directly influenced by government policy?’ the answer is ‘No,’ as it’s fed through from Senior Management. The directive from my boss is: ‘You need to get your students to 540 hours.’

Thus, while middle-managers are tasked with managing and implementing the consequences of government policy change, such changes are, in the most part, resolved tactically by senior management, and subsequently issued as directives.

**Managing Teaching Staff**

In the following data the middle-managers articulate specific ways that they relate to their staff in the course of managing them. *Louise* mentions managing the tension of teaching staff’s focus upon ‘the learner’ with her need for them to generate college business. *Monica* indicates the privileging of *data-metrics* when meeting course leaders, while *Nigel* rationalises some of his management behaviours in terms of his own accountability to senior management.

*Louise:* Staff understand there are other things they have to do, but as long as I make sure they don’t move too far away from the learner it seems to work. I’ve asked some of them to attend The Family Learning Day, at a local school. We’re trying to get parents to engage in English and Maths. So I said: ‘Let’s go because that’s about growth in your area. It’s about bringing your business in.’

*Monica:* We have drill-down meetings where I meet course leaders one-to-one; looking at their course, looking at retention; I have a tracking system that I use. I look at retention, look at timeliness of certification;

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36 Study Programmes were introduced as a consequence of Professor Alison Wolf’s Review of Vocational Education (DFE 2011) whereby Education Funding Agency guidance states that colleges will receive at least 600 hours funding per year, for each student, as long as the student’s Study Programme consists of at least 540 hours learning time.
all that kind of thing; because we have Performance Monitoring Meetings with the Vice-Principal.

_Nigel_: Staff knew that I’d been brought in to turn the department around and felt under increased scrutiny, so I took that on board. But at the same time, as a manager, I want to be able to walk into the Vice-Principal’s office and be asked the difficult question, and know the answer. And that’s what I say to staff: ‘When I get asked a question, I want to know the answer. So, I’m going to ask you first.’

Hence, through the management of their teaching-staff the above articulations indicate a range of middle-manager concerns: that teaching-staff remain learner-focused while being mindful of the college as _a business entity_, the centrality of _data-metrics_ in staff interactions, as well as their _own accountability_ to their respective senior managers.

**Working Hours and Affective States**

All three middle-managers spoke about those hours they worked beyond the 35 expected by their employment contracts; mentioning anywhere between 50 and 60 hours’ work on-site in a typical week; the number of hours worked often influencing their affective states at specific moments:

_Louise_: I have peaks of time where I lose my rational thinking. I tend to lose all sense of reality. I can’t do it in the 35 hours a week, and I’ve not met anybody who could. So, my working day’s half-past seven until six pm.

_Monica_: You’ve got to think ‘It’s a job. Nobody’s gonna die.’ But it is stressful and it comes in peaks and troughs. Sometimes I get a scaredy feeling, that ‘God, I’ve not done so and so!’ You just get it from every angle.

_Nigel_: I haven’t arrived home before 9 o’clock this week. But in terms of staff, I’ve got people that require leadership, and beg for leadership; I’ve got people who don’t want any leadership; I’ve got people who dislike me because of my job title.

_Q. Would you say it is a lonely role?_

_Nigel_: I feel 100 per cent lonely.
Consequently, it is evident that the three middle-managers work significantly longer hours than those demanded by their employment contracts and that their emotional states are often adversely affected, requiring them to be resilient.

Discussion

In the discussion which follows attention is drawn to how the three middle-manager cases, in recounting their working practices, indicate the extent to which they are discursively captured (Gillies 2013); evidenced through the interview-data.

The referent ‘learner’ was mentioned more frequently (54 times) by all three middle-managers than the referent ‘student’ (40 times). However, it was used significantly more by *Louise* and *Monica* (25 and 21) compared with *Nigel* (8) who preferred the term ‘student’ (28). However, *Nigel* used almost identical phrasing to the statement highlighted by Finlay *et al* (2007- see above), as well as that contained in a recent government reform policy document (BIS 2011) when uttering: ‘the learner is central to everything we do’, while, additionally, *Louise* stated: ‘we are all here for the learner’\(^{37}\) and ‘we start from the learner, and that’s what we do’, when relating the content of a previous discussion with her teaching staff. Similarly, *Monica* stated: ‘Everything in my day-to-day job is around the success of that learner’ (speaking in terms of the generic referent ‘learner’ rather than a specific individual). Thus, all three MMs replicated, in their speech, statements very similar to those inscribed in government and institutional documents.

While my archaeological analysis drew attention to the ways that ‘the learner’ is conjoined to ‘employment’ (and correlates such as ‘work’), employability or employment was not particularly something about which the three MMs spoke. *Monica* did mention this aspect but more in terms of the responsibilities for ‘Work-Based Learning’, which her specific MM role demanded. However, I propose that such a general absence is indicative of where ‘employment’ fits in the discursive-material binary of Kendall and Wickham’s Rules (see Rule 4 above): that ‘employment’ *per se* is not part of MM practices, but is more properly recognised in

\(^{37}\) It was not possible to incorporate all of these quotations in the main Genealogical Analysis due to word constraints.
terms of the discursive rationale of the institution (as relates to those understandings of the practices of further education). Thus, in carrying out their work, MMs are arguably assisting in the employment of learner, but indirectly, through ensuring that, foremost, the learner is a ‘success’. All three MMs articulated specific phrases which incorporated the referent ‘success’ which, like the referent ‘learner’, is repeated throughout East College’s SP document (appearing five times within the six Key Milestones under Quality of Provision, see Appendix B - Figure 1). This is exemplified in Louise’s utterance: ‘Everything we do is about success.’ [Emphases added]

However, the particular referent ‘success’ has a specific meaning in the context of the wider discourse of further education and which can be found in government funding policy documents38; and where success (and retention) rates have, latterly, been incentivised. Thus, when MMs speak about ‘success’, while it is a credible way of naming desirable outcomes for learners, its semantic breadth is concealed. Moreover, in its cursory use, the intensity of MM working practices around it are potentially obscured: in those working practices around Data-metrics, for instance, as well as how it informs the project groups in which MMs participate e.g. The Raising Success Rates project group. Furthermore, while institutional funding allocations are awarded on the basis of learner success rates, which are, themselves, calculated on the basis of retention and achievement rates, FE colleges have, also latterly, been incentivised to expand their enrolments39. Thus, for MMs, a major concern is the identification and generation of college income via increased enrolments, as well as negotiating and ensuring conformity to funding allocation regulations. These concerns are exemplified, respectively, by Louise when she speaks about the recruitment of learners to ESOL and English and Maths

38 The funding allocations include a success rate factor that increases the funding allocation for above-average success rates. This provides an incentive to improve retention and success rates. (p.9) (http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/national/nat-16-18-adult-learner-and-employer-responsive-funding-models.pdf, Access date: August 14, 2013)

39 Post-16 providers are incentivised to expand participation, so that they raise their allocations for the next year and strengthen their case in bids for further growth. The allocations formula recognises success rates, and therefore encourages improvements in both retention and achievement. (p.21) (http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/national/nat-16-18-adult-learner-and-employer-responsive-funding-models.pdf, Access date: August 14, 2013)
programmes, and when Nigel mentions how he is instructed to ensure Study Programmes consist of 540 Hours.

Finally, when accounting separately for the referents ‘learner’ and ‘success’, while each can be understood in their own terms, it is clear that the institution’s ‘Quality of Provision’ is understood by way of learner cohorts e.g. ‘Improve 16-18 and 19+ learner success rates overall by 1% or 82% whichever is the higher’ (See Appendix B - Figure 1) [Emphasis added]. Thus, while all three middle-managers foregrounded ‘the learner’ at various times during interviews; exemplified by Monica when she says ‘Everything in my day-to-day job is around the success of that learner’, suggesting a focus on the individual and, possibly, the personal, she could have also said: ‘Everything in my day-to-day job is around success’, or: ‘Everything in my day-to-day job is around learner success rates.’ In understanding her own middle-management work, this is almost precisely what her middle-manager colleague, Louise, does say during interview, when she articulates: ‘Everything we do is about success. It’s about success rates,’ omitting the referent ‘learner.’ Similarly, Nigel states: ‘The learner is central to everything we do. We want high success rates.’ Consequently, as evidenced by the three middle-manager cases at East College, it may be prudent to exercise caution when conceiving FE middle-manager identity in terms of ‘the learner’; particularly where ‘learner’ might be understood as synonymous for, the perhaps more demotic referent, ‘student’; ‘learner’ and ‘success’ appearing to be more fittingly interchangeable within the institution’s ‘regime of truth’ (O’Farrell 2005). Indeed, it is apparent that ‘the learner’ is realised, primarily, by each of the three middle-manager cases, as a calculable entity (Ball 2013), where knowledge about ‘them’ is construed and privileged in terms of ‘data drill-downs’; the practices of ‘drill-ing down’, with an eye to future ‘success’ (rates), evincing their middle-management pre-occupations with data-metrics.

**Summary**

Deploying an analysis rooted in Foucauldian archaeology and genealogy, both separately, and in terms of their interplay, I have paid particular attention to how the ways in which the three middle-manager cases speak reflects East College’s Strategic Plan document. In short, to show how the Strategic Plan document acts as
a disciplining technology (Fitzsimmons 2011) when accounting for those objects that are institutionally recognised; ‘the learner’, as with ‘success’, frequently occurring in middle-manager articulations about the key activities they undertake in the course of their work.
Chapter Six

The Curriculum Middle-manager: Three cases at Central College

Introduction

In the following archaeological analysis I pay particular attention to the ‘Current Strategic Priorities’ section of Central College’s Strategic Plan document (see Appendix C – Figure 1) as these ‘priorities’ are specifically expressed and emphasise particular pressing foci, whereas the inscribed ‘Strategic Objectives’ are generally broad statements of institutional intention from which such ‘priorities’ are derived. Moreover, attention to such discursive statements is significant when considering my subsequent genealogical analysis; to ascertain, for instance, how the inscribed SP priorities are understood by the three Curriculum Managers (CMs) when formulating understandings of their own material working practices, as indicated by what they say and how they speak about their work.

Archaeological analysis of Strategic Plan document

In undertaking an archaeological analysis of Central College’s SP document, it is evident that the document is short, its statements brief, and that institutional quality of provision is understood, primarily, through data-metrics; data-metrics which are calculated in terms of entire learner cohorts:

To maintain an excellent success rate of 80% or above with high levels of both retention and achievement (Current Strategic Priority (i), Central College SP).

However, while it does not mention, specifically, ‘learner cohorts’ in relation to success-rate metrics, it is implicit in Central College’s primary strategic priority statement as success rates, necessarily, must be calculated for every learner programme delivered (in order to make known ‘quality of provision’ to external bodies such as Ofsted). Moreover, success rates can be aggregated by combining individual programme metrics, in any case. Thus, such an explicit benchmark of 80% is applicable to any particular focal-point of analysis, as individual programmes can be aggregated to yield curriculum, divisional or departmental success rates, and even, if required, institutional provision, as a whole.
Consequently, in considering Central College’s SP document as a ‘discursive formation’ (Foucault 1969), such a formation presents statements i.e. knowledge, concisely; in terms of mode of presentation (the overall arrangement of statements), brevity and directive-nature of inscribed statements; and inscribes specific data-metrics to present institutional knowledge about itself to critical external entities (e.g. Ofsted, employers, parents and students), as well as to itself. Moreover, it is worth drawing attention to the hierarchical arrangement of SP statements, where the foremost ‘strategic priority’ explicitly includes the referent ‘success rates’.

Archaeological analysis – rule identification

In using Kendall and Wickham’s (1999) rule identification stages as the method of analysis, I propose that key components of Central College’s SP document are informed, and bounded, by its most recent Ofsted report published in 2009.\(^{40}\)

1. The identification of rules for the production of statements

Immediately under the heading ‘Achievement and Standards’, with the accompanying adjacent text: ‘Outstanding: Grade 1’, Central College’s most recent Ofsted inspection report states:

In agreement with the college’s own assessment, achievement and standards are outstanding. Success rates are high and improving. The overall success rate on long courses has consistently increased since the last inspection and in 2008 was well above the 2007 national average. Success rates on short courses are very high. (Ofsted 2009, p.9)

My analysis proposes that Central College’s strategic priority statement: ‘To maintain an excellent success rate of 80% or above with high levels of both retention and achievement’\(^{41}\) (Strategic priority (i)) [Emphasis added] with its focus upon data-metrics, is as a specific consequence of its most recent Ofsted inspection report. Indeed, listed among the key strengths of the college is the following bulleted item: ‘- High and improving success rates’ (Ofsted 2009). Thus, to maintain...
its position as an ‘Outstanding’ college, current levels of performance, necessarily, must continue. Hence, rules have been established which bound those statements materially present within Central College’s SP, as a consequence of those statements inscribed within the college’s most recent Ofsted report.

Similarly, the other single occurrence of the referent ‘maintain’, inscribed within the SP document, relates specifically to teaching observation grades as understood, once more, in terms of data-metrics: ‘To maintain measured good or better teaching grades in excess of 80%’ (Strategic priority (iii)) [Emphasis added]. Again, I propose that in the production of Strategic priority (iii) its materiality arises from the college’s previously published Ofsted report (i.e. statements within the SP document must conform to specific metric standards previously recognised by Ofsted):

The quality of provision is outstanding. As correctly identified in the self-assessment report, teaching and learning are outstanding. The lesson observation system is thorough and robust; inspectors confirmed its accuracy. The college’s high targets for the proportion of good or better teaching have been exceeded. (Ofsted 2009, p.10)

2. Rules that delimit the sayable

In terms of the second Foucauldian ‘rule’, Central College recognises its own quality of provision through an emphasis on data-metrics which are inseparably tied to the notion (indeed, actuality) of being an ‘Outstanding’ provider. Thus, the particular metrics established (i.e. ‘success rates 80% or above’, ‘measured good or better teaching grades in excess of 80%’) preclude either the acceptability of lower levels of key metrics or, crucially, alternative understandings of quality of provision. Hence, programmes of learning are not necessarily to be pursued for the purposes of enjoyment, for instance, (although this is not necessarily ruled out) but, explicitly, for the stated purpose of achieving specifically targeted metrics. The crucial point in such an analysis is the focus upon the way that statements occur in their actual materiality, about the institution; thus, while ‘enjoyment’ or other potential understandings of provision are not excluded, they are not materially inscribed; they are absent.

The college was awarded ‘Outstanding: Grade 1’ for all five key inspection Ofsted assessment components: Effectiveness of Provision, Capacity to Improve, Achievement and Standards, Quality of Provision and Leadership and Management.
3. Rules that create spaces in which new statements can be made

Kendal and Wickham’s (1999) next stage focuses analysis upon the ways that, within a corpus of statements that are ordered and systematic, new categories of understanding emerge. Thus, ontologically, as indicated by its five foremost hierarchically arranged strategic priority statements, Central College recognises educational provision in terms of specific categories of measurement; in terms of either maintaining existing data metric values or achieving particular targets; respectively: success rates, positive value-added scores\(^{43}\), teaching observation grades, funding targets and employer-engagement targets.

While these might appear similar analytical conclusions to those made earlier, the subtle difference within the latter analysis, is to emphasise how educational provision comes to be understood as a consequence of the ways in which specific knowledge circulates, and where material practices (around such knowledge i.e. discursive practices) are repeated, on a daily basis. This is critical to the ways individuals formulate particular modes of working and what it means to work within an educational institution; how individuals are able to engage in shared understandings: what is, or what becomes, important within individuals’ occupational practices; (as officially endorsed by the institution) and where such practices regularly and repeatedly take place.

**Genealogical analysis of Middle-Manager as the case at Central College**

The following data are extracted from semi-structured interview questions which asked the three Curriculum Managers (CMs) about their working practices at Central College. All the CMs carried out a hybrid role in terms of management and teaching duties (their pedagogic duties ranging from eleven hours to fifteen hours per week). *Dave* and *Harry* worked in vocational occupational trades-related curriculum areas, whereas *Matthew* was employed within the ‘A’ Level division. Each of them

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\(^{43}\) Value-added scores are based on an Ofsted approved methodology which estimates how a student will perform in a given Level 3 qualification by taking a national average of all students’ results in the same qualification, and with the same level of prior achievement at the end of Key Stage 4. A student’s value-added score is calculated by finding the difference between this estimate and how the student actually performed.  
[http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/financialmanagement/b00204762/institutions/level3va](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/financialmanagement/b00204762/institutions/level3va), Access date: December 30, 2013
reported directly to a Head of Division, but also had direct links to the college’s SMT, to an Assistant Principal (please see Appendix S2 which shows their particular reporting structure with reference to the ‘thick layer’ of FE middle-management (Coffield 2012) as illustrated in Appendix S). As evidenced by the generated interview data, such a dual reporting relationship often created micropolitical tensions for them, though their principal reporting arrangement was to their Head of Division. All three CMs had extensive experience within FE (a combined total of around seventy years’ employment); each had worked at other colleges within the North West region of England.

The interview data extracts are grouped under five theme headings: The Role, Data-metrics, Autonomy, Workload Demands and Prioritisation, and Managing Staff and the Micropolitics of Communication.

**The Role**

In responding to the question about how they understood their role at Central College the three middle-managers responded, as follows:

*Dave:* My role is to support SMT (Senior Management Team), so I support my Head of Division. I also work alongside other Curriculum Managers within our Division; there are four in total. So along with supporting Heads of Division at SMT, I also support the Programme Leaders, the teaching staff that are currently here and, also, our Trainer/Assessors. We have eight Trainer/Assessors who are related to each Sector Area. I have 340 Apprentices which all need servicing; in other words, with quality of teaching, curriculum and also liaising with their employers.

*Harry:* Specifically, I see my role as the link person between the Senior Management and the Programme Leaders and Tutors within the Division. So, I think that’s my main function, ensuring that what the College wants to happen is managed by people, such as me, effectively, so that things get done. That’s how I see the role; it’s that link.

*Matthew:* I think it’s a lot of operational day-to-day management. I’ve got a role which is both curriculum-specific and pastoral. It’s changed dramatically in the five years since I started, because the number of students has doubled in that time. Basically, I’m responsible for a group of subjects and a cohort of students, and within that there’s four first
year and four second year tutor groups. And I’m responsible for room allocation and staff allocation to subjects, and also dealing with disciplinary issues. You know, there’s a tutor there, and I’m the next layer up, and after that there’s the Head of Division. That’s my sort of role, and there are also quality issues, in terms of subjects.

In considering the ‘thick layer’ of middle-management common within English FE college structures (Coffield 2012), the Curriculum Managers occupy the lower echelon of such a layer. They are middle-managers who Page (2011a, 2011b) would recognise as First-Tier Managers; managers whose work requires significant amounts of pedagogic labour.

**Data-metrics**

In explaining their work as CMs, each spoke in terms of the importance of *data-metrics*; for example, in the form of success rates, and the necessity for students to complete their programmes of study.

**Dave:** The main concern is success rates. We need to make sure we’re hitting them against the national benchmarks and not performing at the minimum level. Our main target is striving to achieve 80%, and then to drive the success rates up above 80% over time.

**Harry:** The Heads of Division have targets and then we, as CMs, have targets. And to meet those targets we need to ensure that any learner stays on-programme and succeeds; completes the year and passes everything they’re given; it’s that basic.

**Matthew:** A key theme really for us is, massively, success rates; success. We take so many students on in the first year, we want those students to progress to the second year, and then to progress on to university, or work. We’ve got targets in terms of national rates and value-added; positive value-added. This year, getting students to progress from first year to second year is a massive target. We’re very, very aware of that.

In *Matthew’s view*, Sixth Form departmental success rates were privileged by the institution’s senior management over instances of student self-determination. He relates a specific situation where an A Level student, after completing Year One, elected to pursue a BTEC Level Three programme, instead of naturally progressing onto Year Two. *Matthew* referred to this as ‘a sideways move’.
Matthew: A sideways move is probably not a negative thing, but senior management don’t see it that way. Personally, if a student has decided that a different route for them is the right thing, then I think that’s a positive outcome. But it’s seen to be less positive as far as senior management are concerned; they want progression, with positive value-added. It’s affecting the data and it’s affecting, the sort of, the push for ‘Outstanding Plus’. [Laughs]

Linked to the importance of specific success rate data-metrics was how these particular metrics were also understood in terms of the need to satisfy particular targeted numbers of programme enrolments; target numbers being critical in the generation of specific departmental revenues. This is exemplified in the interview data below.

Dave: Most important are the actual Funding Lines; making sure we’re up to our Funding Line. 16-18 is where the pressures are. Basically, if you don’t achieve your 16-18 profile targets you could be at risk of a reduced amount the following year.

Harry: We’re given target numbers of students that we must recruit in each area. And each year those numbers seem to increase. And you need them for funding purposes, because if you don’t meet your target numbers, you don’t get the funding that’s required; so it’s really, really important.

In formulating his own understanding of the way expected recruitment numbers are actually calculated, Harry explains that the targets given to CMs account for the likelihood of a certain amount of programme drop-offs (what he refers to as ‘churn’), however, even where a programme might be less attractive to potential students, as indicated by lower actual enrolments in a given year, the target number, the following year, is set still higher.

Harry: They always put on 10% to allow for churn, but even so it still seems to increase. Even though you didn’t reach your target number last year, for it to increase doesn’t make sense when the number is falling within that area, but it still increases. And I think that’s the case in all colleges. And it makes it extremely difficult.

Moreover, Harry explains his own accountability in terms of programme retention data.
Harry: It’s not only that, you’ve got to justify everything. I have to keep a database now and I’ve got to say where every learner that leaves has gone to. So I’m just keeping a rolling spreadsheet of everyone who’s enrolled and has now left. And I’ve got to feed that back; why they’ve gone, where they’ve gone to. So it’s not just a case of them leaving, I’ve got to know why they’ve left.

In summary, when describing their working practices, all three CMs spoke about learner retention and success rates, as well as enrolment and funding targets, as central to their work.

Autonomy

All three CMs explicitly mentioned that in terms of their respective areas of responsibility they were able to operate in an autonomous fashion. However, such autonomy was exercised within a framework of pre-determined targeted enrolment numbers which equated to specific divisional revenues, set by senior management.

Dave: We’re kind of autonomous down here. We’re allowed to basically run our department the way we want to run it, provided we’re not adversely affecting success rates or revenue streams.

Dave perceived that, relative to other curriculum areas, his own particular department was expected to generate more revenue:

Dave: My department’s profile, in terms of revenue for the college, we’re seen as ‘a cash cow’.

Q. In terms of revenue?

Dave: Yes. If we compare different areas and the amounts they bring in. Right, let me try and explain. When we look at the departmental profile, the profile is not put down as monetary value; it’s put down as student starts. So it says, ‘you must bring in 67 16-18 starts and 21 25+ starts’; it doesn’t show the monetary value of each of the different types of start. Other divisions may bring in 25+ learners which attract a significantly lower amount of income compared with a 16-18 learner, but then our division could be pressured to bring in more 16-18s because our senior management know that for one of our learners, at 16, over the course of time, they may bring in around £19,000 compared to somebody in another division that brings in 25+ learners, that are only valued at £2,000. So those are some of the pressures that are directed down.
In providing an explanation of the additional revenues his division is expected to
generate, Dave notes that actual monetary values are not explicitly expressed.
Hence, where inscribed numbers might appear comparatively equitable in terms of
overall target enrolments, when analysed further to account for the different types
of start, he recognises relative inequities in terms of divisional income generation. In
doing so, Dave draws attention to the way separate divisions internally compete
with one another.

Continuing the focus on autonomy, Harry, while noting the constant demands
placed upon him, asserts that he is afforded a significant amount of freedom in his
role as Curriculum Manager.

*Harry:* You don’t just have one job now. It’s like, teach that group,
provide advice and guidance; interview these students. The demands are
constant but I honestly believe I have an awful lot of autonomy.

Matthew, while expressing a similar view to Harry, specifically mentions divisional
rather than individual autonomy.

*Matthew:* The divisions have a lot of autonomy. Financial targets are set.
But the divisions do have a lot of autonomy, as long as they reach their
targets; as long as they deliver.

Notably, he perceives that the college’s senior management team (SMT) lack both
experience and understanding of the A Level curriculum. Thus, in shaping academic
provision, while remaining the ultimate decision-makers, SMT rely on those Sixth-
Form CMs, such as Matthew, to provide crucial input.

*Matthew:* Within the Sixth Form, none of the SMT has much experience
of delivering ‘A’-levels, so in terms of formulating strategy I think they try
to develop it, but I feel they don’t really understand it. So there’s a bit of
conflict between us; we’ll come up with ideas of how to do things, and
they’ll have ideas, and there’s a sort of compromise.

Consequently, all three CMs, while steered by institutional *data-metrics*, specifically,
success rates, enrolment numbers and revenue targets, perceive their working
practices and divisional operations as largely autonomous. Moreover, their
hierarchical position within the college, as evinced by Matthew, demonstrates their
criticality in both the development and delivery of institutional academic and
vocational provision; straddling the divide between management and teaching, through the hybridity of their role.

Workload demands and prioritisation

In this section each of the three CMs alludes to the expanse of demands faced in their hybrid identity. In the first interview extract, Dave echoes Matthew’s articulation immediately above, again demonstrating their critical institutional position in shaping curriculum provision while, simultaneously, carrying out significant pedagogic work.

Dave: Our Assistant Principal will send me an email, basically, a prod, and he’ll say: ‘Have you considered these Frameworks? Have you looked at this Framework?’ We would like to sit down more, to be able to plan more, but it’s difficult when you’re teaching and trying to do all the other things. And then, it’s not unusual that later on, in the same day, I’ll look up and he’ll be stood next to me and he’ll say: ‘Have you done anything about this yet?’ And I’ll be thinking, ‘For God’s sake. Let me just get on with my job!’

Harry mentions the volume of emails he regularly receives, suggesting an institutional reliance upon information technology for internal communications.

Harry: The amount of emails I get is incredible. I had 65 in one day. Physically, when you’re teaching, and you’re managing at the same time, you can’t answer 65 and give them justice. So, wherever I can, I pick up the ‘phone and go and see the person. It gets you out of the office and you get the opportunity to speak to different people along the way.

Matthew speaks in terms of ‘getting the job done’; regularly working a significant number of hours beyond the 37 per week contractually required.

Matthew: I think you’re expected to get the job done, so if you need to do the work, then you do it, whether it’s here or at home, it doesn’t really matter, as long as it’s done. I think once you’ve done your teaching and marking; it depends week on week, but certainly 55 hours would be typical.

The three CMs all worked a similar amount of hours and spoke in terms of finding opportunities, either early in the morning, or later in the day, to respond to
management requests or deal with complaints from students and parents; the latter always having to be dealt with as a matter of urgency.

Managing Staff and the Micropolitics of Communication

In the final section, data drawn from the three interviews provides insight into the complexities of the CMs’ management of staff. Moreover, the data hints at some of the institutional micropolitics, for instance how CMs translate SMT communications prior to dissemination in order to maximise the likelihood that information will be accepted, as in Dave’s interview extract immediately below.

Dave: I, sort of, act like a sponge. We soak up a lot of the information that comes down from SMT and if you were to give that same information out to the staff you would probably get barraged. So, it needs re-wording; it needs re-sculpting into a way that people are going to understand.

When interacting with teachers and assessors, Dave mentions the importance of impression-management and self-presentation, as well as the adaptation of verbal communications depending on the recipient’s institutional hierarchical position.

Dave: It’s always important to have a smile on your face even though you feel like you’re about to explode. If you come out of a meeting and your face is like thunder, or if you come out and you’re laughing, it can give the wrong impression. You’ve to have a balanced way of showing your mannerisms and body language. It’s also how you talk to people in meetings. I’ll speak differently to SMT than when I talk to the teaching staff. It’s a different language, a different way of speaking.

Similarly, when reflecting on the importance of appearing ‘professional’ in the totality of working practices, Harry considers email communication as a specific mode of self-presentation. Moreover, he alludes to some of the difficulties of email communication that allow for interpersonal conflict which could be damaging.

Harry: You’ve got to be professional, in everything you do. With every email, you’ve got to structure and word it correctly; check there’s no errors, no spelling mistakes. An email says an awful lot about the person that’s sent it. So you haven’t got to be abrupt. Even if they’re coming back to you and maybe being abrupt with you, you can’t respond; because there are occasions when you can be drawn in.
Thus, both Dave and Harry recognise the array of communication skills required of a CM; verbal, non-verbal (i.e. body-language) and written; to present a particular ‘self’ and to be capable of adapting styles of language and ways of speaking when managing staff, or being managed themselves.

Finally, Matthew, as a consequence of questions related to managing others and being managed himself, offered an explanation as to why he did not wish to ascend the management ladder beyond his current hybrid role; to a Head of Division post, for example. He provides a rationale where he considers that the changed culture of Further Education means that the duties of such posts requires, for instance, that teaching staff be dismissed for ‘under-performance’, specifically mentioning ‘under-performance’ as understood in terms of students’ results.

Matthew: Now, as a Head of Division, you’re expected to manage absence and under-performance. And that element of fear is present, more so in FE than at any time before. You know, for teachers, in terms of: ‘If I don’t get those results I might lose my job.’ Which I think, was never around before. If you didn’t get your results you were seen to be crap! [laughs] Now, you lose your job!

However, while Matthew states that he would not wish to dismiss a member of teaching staff himself, he recognises that, within the performative culture of FE, such actions can be reasonably justified.

Matthew: I’m not saying I would necessarily disagree with such a decision, but I wouldn’t want to be the person making the decision. I’d just feel too uncomfortable.

It is arguable that Matthew’s ambivalence is as a direct consequence of him being a CM, someone who both manages and teaches, and that his expressed discomfort in considering the personal dismissal of a teacher stems from his strong pedagogic identity, where his own working history within FE has always involved a significant amount of teaching.

Discussion

The following discussion, through the data produced through middle-management interviews, pays attention to the extent to which the three CMs at Central College are discursively captured (Gillies 2013), at both institutional and governmental level.
Additionally, this supports the fourth stage of my deployment of Kendall and Wickham’s (1999) method, whereby those *material practices* that accompany *discursive practices* are discerned; assessing how the particular ways in which the middle-managers speak about their work is traceable to those statements inscribed within their institution’s SP document and where links to government policy agenda are evident.

Specifically, in terms of the five foremost strategic priorities within the college’s SP document, the three CMs spoke in varying degrees about the achievement and maintenance of those particular *data-metrics* contained within it although, notably, *all three* mentioned both *success rates* and *funding targets*. Indeed, in relation to success rates, *Dave* cites the particular SP document metric exactly: ‘The main concern is success rates … Our main target is striving to achieve 80%, and then to drive the success rates up above 80% over time.’

Likewise, *Matthew* states: ‘A key theme really for us is, massively, success rates ... This year, getting students to progress from first year to second year is a massive target.’ *Matthew* uses, respectively, the adverb and adjective, ‘massively’ and ‘massive’, to suggest his explicit recognition of the importance of both success rates and targets, as well as how progression from Year One to Year Two, within A Level programmes, is critical to success rate statistics; drop-offs at the end of Year One affecting success rate statistics when such *data-metrics* are calculated at the end of Year Two.

Of the three CMs, only *Matthew* mentions his working practices in terms of ‘Strategic Priority (ii)’ which is concerned with value-added scores, a particular metric which takes into account the individual learner’s starting point and the grades they achieve (please refer to footnote on p.93 above). However, this is hardly surprising given the particular focus of his work where value-added scores are relevant only to Level Three programmes (i.e. A Levels and BTEC qualifications). *Dave* and *Harry’s* curriculum areas specifically relate to vocational trades, consequently, they mentioned those more pressing issues, such as Employer Engagement targets (strategic priority (iv)), however, due to word restrictions it has

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44 For two year programmes, such as ‘A’ Levels or BTEC Level Three Programmes, success rate statistics are calculated at the completion of Year Two.
not been possible to include these interview data. However, just as they did not mention ‘value-added scores’, neither did Matthew mention the importance of ‘targets for employer-facing programmes’, as these are not part of his curriculum area remit.

All three CMs made reference to Strategic Priority (iv) which is an inscribed directive related to the achievement of ‘planned targets in respect of major funding bodies’ and which can be seen as derived from, and linked to, the broader institutional Strategic Objective (number six) which notes a desire to assure ‘stable financial health’. Interestingly, while all three CMs mention both success-rates and funding it is noteworthy that, in recent FE history, these have been inextricably linked: funding-claims made by FE institutions being dependent on particular success-rate factors; a fact not unnoticed in the Review of Vocational Education (DfE 2011), undertaken by the Coalition government (May 2010 - present), and which is generally referred to as ‘The Wolf Report’:

...[t]his is the only country, to the best of my knowledge, where institutions routinely spend money attending workshops which explain the latest wrinkles in the funding formula and how best to exploit these ... College principals and deputy principals spend days exploring the intricacies of ‘success rate data anomalies’ which will have a major impact on their annual budgets (p.62)

Within The Wolf Report, the phrase ‘perverse incentives’ is inscribed in ten separate instances to describe how it recognises that, during the period of the previous New Labour government, institutions have in many cases privileged the achievement of success-rates to the detriment of individual student provision, claiming that colleges routinely ‘steer students onto courses they can easily pass’ while simultaneously creating ‘strong incentives for awarding bodies to make passing easy’ (DfE 2011, p.90). However, whether the three CMs are aware of this perspective is a moot point, the fact remains that all of them separately mentioned both the importance of success rates, and the requirement to achieve financial targets; financial targets which Dave recognised as being ‘directed down’, and where he understood his vocational area as being perceived by senior management as a ‘cash cow’45.

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45 Cash cow; definition: A business or product which generates a steady, dependable flow of cash (http://www.investorwords.com/759/cash_cow.html, Access date: January 2, 2014)
Consequently, as evidenced by the documentary and interview data drawn from Central College, there is a clear relationship between the discursive content of the SP document and the material practices of the middle-manager. All three middle-managers when describing their working practices replicate not only the directives of the SP document but evince their own specific knowledge about particular data metric values. Moreover, all three, separately, highlighted the importance of success-rates which, in terms of the ordering and arrangement of statements (Foucault 1969) is, crucially, the principal strategic priority inscribed in Central College’s SP document. Still further, assessing the interview data as a unified ‘corpus of statements’ (Kendall and Wickham 1999), the first five key strategic priorities inscribed within the SP document are all mentioned as being critical to CMs’ work (crucially, without any individual CM explicitly making reference to the SP document, at any point). Finally, there is distinct evidence that key material inscriptions within the college’s SP document are bound to their most recent Ofsted inspection report; reflecting components of discursive formations at a wider level; this is perhaps best exemplified when the ‘A’ level CM expresses the quest for ‘Outstanding Plus’ (see page 96); an invented category that extends Ofsted’s actual highest achievable grade, reflecting the pervasiveness of ‘the Ofsted agenda’ in defining his work.

**Summary**

In summarising how data from Central College allow the research questions to be addressed: each of the CMs recognises a significant degree of autonomy in carrying out their role. However, at the same time they recognise that any such autonomy is restricted by the confines of those targets, financial and statistical, stipulated by senior management; whereby, each of them must be vigilant about data-metrics and their achievement; a vigilance which permeates their work such that they are required to be preoccupied by them. Such a situation suggests a microcosm of Gleeson et al.’s (2005) observation who note that ‘the [FE] sector operates within a context of licensed autonomy’ (p.447) and where (Avis 2003) observes that its professionals are treated as ‘trusted servants rather than as empowered professionals’ (p. 329). However, the interview data strongly indicate that, in terms
of institutional curriculum provision and development, the CMs at Central College play a crucial role. For example, *Dave* mentioned the pressures he felt in attempts to ‘get on with his job’ while simultaneously faced with senior management demands to develop new curricula. Likewise, *Matthew* expressed the view that SMT didn’t really understand ‘A’ Level provision. Thus, Central College’s SMT appear particularly reliant upon CMs for their vocational and curriculum knowledge; to inform key operational, tactical and, even, strategic decisions.

Finally, the CMs appear to experience what Briggs (2006) refers to as ‘the classic “piggy in the middle” situation’ (p.69), which she notes is a common problem for FE middle-managers. For example, *Dave* articulates the importance of translating SMT directives and information into a language that his teachers and assessors would find palatable, while *Harry* articulates the importance of self-presentation when communicating via email, particularly when presenting information hierarchically upward and in minimising conflict. Consequently, it is apparent that the CMs experience particular tensions in occupying a ‘middle’ position and suggests that, in order to execute their role effectively, while they must remain ever vigilant with regard to those *data-metrics* within their remit, a disposition imbued with a significant degree of self-awareness is also essential.
Chapter Seven

The Curriculum Middle-manager: Three cases at West College

Introduction

The following archaeological analysis shows that West College’s strategic plan document (see Appendix D – Figure 1), in announcing broad statements of institutional intent through the use of similar words, while creating a particular impression, upon analysis and scrutiny, a sense of vagueness is discernible, certainly when these statements are considered as an assemblage. By way of contrast, the analysis further indicates the significant presence of a range of ‘Key Performance Indicators’ which rather than vague, in their very specificity, provide precision and exactitude. Subsequently, the genealogical analysis shows that it is these data-metrics, in their very definitiveness, that serve to discursively capture the three senior middle-managers at West College, and how such capture is manifested in their working practices.

Archaeological analysis of Strategic Plan document

In undertaking an archaeological analysis of West College’s SP document its mode of presentation is noteworthy: a 28-page document replete with colour photographic-images of West College’s new campus buildings, student activity, aesthetically-pleasing local scenery, containing separate introductions by the Chair of Governors and the college’s Principal, with accompanying photographic portraits. The conclusion to the Principal’s introduction states:

Through this strategic plan, the College will remain in a strong position, educationally and financially, for the years ahead steered by a supportive Corporation board and talented staff. (West College Strategic Plan 2011/13, p.3)

The SP document is then structured as follows: the college’s separate Mission and Vision statements, as well as its stated Values, are inscribed on a single-page, followed by its nine Strategic Objectives, each on separate pages, with accompanying Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) against which the achievement of each Strategic Objective is assessed and measured. Individual Strategic Objectives are presented at the top of each page in a prominent font within a bordered frame.
Underneath each frame is a relatively detailed explanation of the purpose and meaning of the particular Strategic Objective. For example, under Strategic Objective One – ‘Set High Expectations to Promote the Consistent Achievement of Aspirational Learning Goals’ the following text is inscribed:

This objective is the College’s quality strategy which incorporates the production and monitoring of an outstanding self-assessment report. Under-performing courses will be identified and monitored. Data reports will continue to be refined and improvements made and staff trained in their use. (West College Strategic Plan 2011/13, p.11)

Subsequent to each explanation a framed list of KPIs then follows (for Strategic Objective One, please refer to Appendix D - Figure 3, ‘Key Performance Indicators to Measure Progress against Strategic Objective One’). Overall, for the nine stated Strategic Objectives (please see Appendix D - Figure 1) there are a total of 29 KPIs; individual Strategic Objectives being accompanied by as many as seven KPIs, or as few as two. Finally, there is a separate list of twelve Strategic Priorities for 2012 (please see Appendix D - Figure 2). Hence, in its structure, for ease of comprehension and due to its complexity, compared with the preceding colleges’ SP documents, it is presented schematically (see Figure 1.1. below):

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Figure 1.1. West College Strategic Plan Document Structure 2011/13

- Mission Statement
- Vision Statement
- Values statements (6)
- Strategic Objectives (9)
- Explanation of Strategic Objectives (9)
- Key Performance Indicators to Measure progress of Strategic Objectives (29)
- Strategic Priorities for 2012 (12)
Archaeological analysis – rule identification

The following section, using Kendal and Wickham’s (1999) rule identification method, considers some of the rules discernible within the SP document, via the same three-step process undertaken within the two preceding chapters for both East and Central College.

1. The identification of rules for the production of statements

In considering the mode and content of West College’s SP document I propose two noteworthy rules for the production of statements. Firstly, that the production of statements is a specific form of self-presentation: both to externally interested parties, such as Ofsted, for the purposes of what Ball (2003) would recognise as institutional ‘fabrication’, as well as its own employees and Corporation Board. The style and presentation format of the SP document demonstrates significant meticulosity in its construction; for instance, the inclusion of high-quality colour images of college-life, some of which capture unusual perspectives of campus buildings, and the ways they are arranged to complement inscribed SP statements.

Secondly, a significant number of inscribed SP statements are broad in scope (please refer to the assemblage of Mission, Vision and Values Statements, see Appendix D - Figure 1), to the point whereby, in the same way that Ball (1993) writes about ‘policy discourse’ that produce ‘frameworks of sense and obviousness’ (p.44), such broadness can plausibly be considered as an effective device in the achievement of consensus. However, the potential for, and actuality of, such consensus is facilitated through the use of particular words which, while carefully considered, might appear ‘obvious’ to the point of appearing slippery. For example, the SP document has not only a Mission Statement, but a Vision Statement, as well as a set of Values. In examining these separately, as well as an assemblage, almost identical words occur in both the institution’s Mission and Vision e.g. ‘aspirations’ and ‘aspiring’, respectively, while a very similar semantic instance – ‘striving’- occurs within its Values statements. The Mission announces: ‘Raise aspirations’, the Vision inscribes: ‘Aspiring [and] innovating’, while the hierarchically-second Values statement
declares: ‘Strive for Excellence’; the latter’s ‘striving’ being closely-related to ‘aspiration’ and ‘aspiring’

Min (1997) refers to the clustering of related terms that are near synonyms which exist together as ‘overwording or overlexicalization’ (p.152) (see also Fairclough 2000; Fowler 1991); indicating a particular preoccupation that conveys certain meanings the producers of texts purposefully intend. Thus, the SP, by repeatedly inscribing the use of closely-related words within broad statements, under separate rubrics, provides not only a particular impression of West College’s institutional purpose but announces the ways in which it intends to know and conduct itself: via assemblages of words that ‘make sense’ whereby the institution’s Mission: ‘raising aspirations for the benefit of individuals, communities and the economy’ appears ‘obvious’, to the point of being irrefutable. However, when considering a range of synonyms, as well as similar phrasing (see also ‘achieving together’, ‘realising potential’, respectively, in the Vision and Values statements), within different rubrics (i.e. Mission, Vision and Values), the SP, arguably, obfuscates. For instance, when generally considered, how readily discernible are the differences between Mission and Vision statements? Indeed, O’Connell (2005) remarks: ‘For several years we struggled with definitions of what a vision was [at Runshaw College]’ (p.126)

Following the second Foucauldian rule, attention is given to the limits about what can be stated about ‘objects’ and other ‘things’ (i.e. material practices and accompanying behaviours; for example, the measurement and measuring of ‘progress’) which ontologically occur within discursive formations. Consequently, at this particular step I wish to draw attention to the limits that constrain each of the

46 Entering ‘striving’ into the on-line thesaurus http://thesaurus.com yields both ‘aspiration’ and ‘aspiring’ [Access date: April 11, 2014]
inscribed Strategic Objectives. Again, like the Mission, Vision and Values statements, the nine Strategic Objectives yield broad statements of intention, for instance, SO1 states: ‘Set high expectations to promote the consistent achievement of aspirational learning goals’ (see Appendix D - Figure 1). However, the SP document makes clear that such a broad statement is inextricably tied to, and understood by, its corresponding Key Performance Indicator statements (see Appendix D - Figure 3); KPIs which ‘measure progress against [each] Strategic Objective [One through Nine]’ [Emphases added].

In actuality, SO1 is evaluated by measuring progress against no less than seven KPIs; each quantitatively precise. The first four KPIs provide specific achievement targets of 89%, 91%, 95% and 86% for, respectively, Learner Attendance, Retention, Achievement and Success rates for 16-18 year old learner data. KPIs five, six and seven, respectively, inscribe precise achievement quantitative metrics for Apprenticeship and Workplace learning (89% and 92%, respectively), internally-graded Lesson Observations (95%, Good or Outstanding) and Learner Satisfaction for full-time enrolments (96%). Hence, in understanding SO1, it is known, and delimited, through exact numeric values; values which specify whether, in the future, SO1 is realised, or not.

Indeed, through the specification of 29 KPIs, all of West College’s nine Strategic Objectives are demarcated by precisely specified data metric targets. Hence, in summary, in terms of those Foucauldian rules which ‘delimit the sayable’, ontologically, West College’s KPIs delimit its Strategic Objectives; as well as determining, epistemologically, the ways in which SOs are to be known.

3. Rules that create spaces in which new statements can be made

In this Foucauldian rule, Kendall and Wickham’s (1999) method is attentive to the ‘novelty of new statements’ (p.44) and the ways new categories of understanding are created. Thus, I wish to draw attention to those statements which make reference to West College’s ‘Commercial and International income’ (see Appendix D

Attendance refers to class attendance percentage rates for learners, while Success rates are calculated by multiplying Retention and Achievement percentages. (Please refer to http://fechoices.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/Pages/DataExplained.aspx for further clarification, Access date: April 14, 2014)
- Figure 2, Strategic Priorities for 2012, item [iii] and which plausibly relates to SOs Two and Eight: the former inscribing the need to provide learning opportunities for employers, the latter inscribing the requirement for the institution to be financially stable. Consequently, new ways of understanding the purpose of the institution, through its SP document, materialize in statements about the ‘driving up of Commercial and International Income’ (see Appendix D - Figure 2).

While, historically, FE colleges have been attentive to the needs of neighbouring industries in ‘the vocational tradition’ (Pring 1995) as well as the training of occupational competencies in the form of NVQs (Lucas 2004), and have been recognised by some as the ‘Handmaidens of British Industry’ (Ainley and Bailey 1997) [Emphasis added], I propose that the inscription ‘Commercial’, in its specific adjacency to ‘International’, does not, by necessity, mean ‘vocational’ nor ‘training’ in FE’s historic sense. ‘Commercial’ can be conceived as a particular ‘surface of emergence’ (Foucault 1969) that accounts for structural changes to the UK economy, locally and nationally, as well as a strategic response, by West College, to public service reforms48; while, ‘International’, emerges from wider discursive formations, both outside and inside the FE domain, accounting for the ‘global economy’ and ‘global FE’ (DfE 2011).

Genealogical analysis of Middle-Manager as the case at West College

The following data are extracted from semi-structured interview questions which asked the three Centre-Heads (CHs) about their working practices at West College. To assist in the presentation of these data, interviewee utterances are grouped under six themed headings, namely: The Role, followed by those working practices and issues of attention mentioned in common by each of them: Data-metrics, Ofsted’s Agenda and Requirements, Annual Business Planning Activity, International and Commercial Course Provision and, finally, Micropolitics and Self-presentation. The data are presented, as far as possible, to give equal voice to the three

48 FE Corporations and Sixth Form College Corporations in England were recorded as part of the public sector up to the first quarter of 2012, but have since been re-classified to the private sector. (http://www.theguardian.com/politics/reality-check/2012/oct/10/conservative-conference-2012-davidcameron, Access date: April 14, 2014)
interviewees, as well as drawing attention to the consistencies in their working practices. The particular layer they occupy within the ‘thick layer’ of FE middle-management (Coffield 2012) is senior middle-management (see Appendix S); their particular reporting structure is illustrated in Appendix S3.

The Role

The question which asked the middle-managers how they understood their role elicited the following responses:

**Barbara:** I am actually a senior middle-manager which means that I manage other middle-managers. Although it is a middle-management role, I suppose it’s got that extra dimension to it. I’m very much the link between the Executive and those middle-managers who manage particular curriculum areas within this Centre.

**Amanda:** Generally, a role of a middle-manager, well, a senior middle-manager, is to be involved in the development of the college’s strategy and then to make sure it is followed in the Centre, by the staff.

**Gordon:** I manage everything that’s related to the running of this Centre, which includes budgets, recruitment targets, success rates, retention, achievement; and staff, including curriculum managers. And to manage them in conjunction with targets which are set by the Executive.

All three middle-managers, each of whose job-title was ‘Centre-Head’, had been appointed to their current position having previously held middle-management positions with responsibilities for specific curriculum areas at West College. Hence, each had been promoted internally. With reference to the ‘thick layer’ of middle-management which Coffield (2012) claims characterises contemporary English FE college structures, the college’s Centre-Heads might usefully be understood to occupy the upper echelon of such a layer. Indeed, during interview, both Barbara and Amanda drew attention to their particular ‘middle’ position, specifically referring to themselves as ‘senior middle-managers’; Barbara understanding her institutional position as the nexus between West College’s Executive and her centre’s Curriculum Area Managers. Rather than remarking on his own hierarchical position Gordon, instead, drew attention to the scope of his work by summarising many of the responsibilities associated with his Centre-Head role. He mentioned the targets his Centre was expected to meet, set by the college’s Executive, related to
learner recruitment numbers, in addition to learner-programme retention, achievement and success rates.

**Data-metrics**

Each of the Centre-Heads articulated how *data-metrics* and their analyses were essential components of their working practices.

*Amanda*: A key priority is keeping my eye on the data. I probably do enjoy working with data *[laughs]*, so I probably do it more than I need to. For every Learner Withdrawal I would calculate what that means for the Retention Figures. And then, if it’s a Level Two programme, what that would mean for our Level Two data, overall. I’m monitoring that all of the time.

In the above interview data, *Amanda* articulates that she calculates how the withdrawal of a single learner from specific course impacts those Retention metrics for the *individual programme*, as well as the way it affects *aggregated* Centre data i.e. *all* Level Two programmes. Interestingly, *Amanda* remarks that she pays attention to data more than she actually needs to; stating that she experiences satisfaction when working with them, and that her practice of data monitoring is continuous. Likewise, *Barbara* attends to data as a means by which she manages her own Centre; conspicuous deficits prompting interaction with appropriate staff:

*Barbara*: I spend a lot of time monitoring what’s going on in my Centre; so, looking at the data, seeing where we are and talking to people about any slippages.

In the following interview extract, *Gordon* provides details of the scope of activities within his own Centre that can be understood, *and known*, through data analyses, which occur at regularly planned meetings.

*Gordon*: We have monthly Performance Monitoring meetings with the Executive, and that’s based on everything within Centre. So that’s anything from Lesson Observations and Staff Appraisals through to, earlier on in the year, Recruitment, and obviously when you get to this time of year, your Success, Retention and Achievement data.

The Performance Monitoring meetings *Gordon* attends are understood by him as all-encompassing in their remit; for instance, incorporating not only learner-related metrics such as Success, Retention and Achievement (SRA) data, but also staff-related, such as Staff Appraisal and internally-conducted Lesson Observation data.
In summary, when discussing their working practices, *data-metrics* were understood by each of the Centre-Heads as a crucial means by which to understand, and know, their respective Centres.

**Ofsted’s Agenda and Requirements**

Each of the CHs spoke about the importance of Ofsted and were mindful of the possibility of an imminent inspection given that the college’s previous Ofsted Inspection had taken place in Autumn 2007, where West College had been graded as an ‘Outstanding’ provider. In articulating concerns around Ofsted, *Gordon* mentions student targets, the planning of his Centre’s Tutorial provision which account for such targets, as well as how he considers that the college’s quality assurance metrics should be congruous with an Ofsted-adjudged ‘Outstanding’ provider, as evidenced by internally observed Teaching and Learning grades.

*Gordon:* In terms of the Ofsted agenda, you go to your students and say: ‘Do you know where you’re up to? What are your targets? Are you on target? Are you not on target?’ These targets link into planning; you’ve got to plan your Tutorials; what’s going to be happening in Tutorials? These things are part and parcel of planning for Ofsted. And also, Ofsted are going to come in and look at our profile for Teaching and Learning observation grades. A Grade One College should, roughly-speaking, have 85% Good or better, across the board.

*Amanda* expressed her own understanding of how an Ofsted inspection can be ‘triggered’ following numerically negative changes in those data contained in compulsory data-returns.

*Amanda:* Ofsted look for trends and dips in the college’s data. A series of dips can trigger an inspection.

While discussing the need to be attentive to Ofsted, interestingly, *Barbara* understands the college as being constrained; limiting the capacity for West College to formulate its own strategy.

*Barbara:* The College doesn’t have a great deal of control in shaping its strategy. A lot of what we do comes through government policy and external bodies, so that the outline of the strategy tends to be quite defined. Then it’s a case of putting the meat on the bones.
However, in terms of Ofsted, she expressed how their inscribed requirements can be mediated through the college’s ‘Vision’ and where Barbara’s own Centre, in the development of innovative pedagogy was, she had earlier claimed: ‘ahead of the rest of the college’. Barbara continues:

So we look at Ofsted requirements and then we translate those requirements into what that means for actual provision; putting policies in place that are mediated by our vision, but which come directly from Ofsted. For example, looking at Ofsted’s emphasis on Teaching and Learning; what does that mean for our learners?

As evidenced above, Ofsted was recognised as an important external factor by the three CHs, although each of them articulated their concerns in different ways. For instance, Gordon emphasised the importance of individual student targets, while Amanda expressed the potential for ‘triggering’ the actual inspection process due to institutional deficiencies brought to light, by Ofsted, through their scrutiny of West College’s periodic data-returns.

**Annual Business Planning**

Each of the three CHs mentioned their involvement in West College’s Business Planning process which is undertaken during the final term of the academic year in conjunction with the college’s Executive, to prepare for the next college year. In the following, Gordon remarks on the recent changes to specific funding regulations and their implications for learner programmes.

*Gordon:* We’re currently carrying out Business Planning for the Centre. It can be a lengthy process. So we’re given Business Planning guidance which is linked to the Skills Funding Agency’s funding requirements, as to what’s expected for the next academic year: what the funding methodology is; new programmes of study; what’s got to be integrated into a programme of study, and how that differs from this academic year. So, you’ve got to look at what impact that may have on current programmes. For instance, Study Programmes next year, for full-time learners, can’t be full-time unless they’re doing 540 hours. And we don’t get funded per qualification now; we get funded for Study Programmes that are between 540 and 600 hours. If we do more than 600 hours we don’t get any extra money.

Likewise, Amanda mentions how her own Centre is required to respond to government directives, as well as institutionally-determined targets, formulated by
and in consultation with the college’s Executive, through the institution’s Business Planning process.

_Amanda:_ We have to look at the priorities; what the government says we need to do and anything we need to respond to. We’re given target numbers and then we’ve to work out how we’re going to meet those targets.

_Q. So you’re given particular targets for all your areas, then?_

_Amanda:_ Yes. The figures tend to be historically-based. What we’ve either planned for last year or what we achieved last year. The Executive would look at that and say: ‘Well, if you did that last year, we might ask you to do the same or we might ask you to do what you actually planned for, or what you hit, or just a few more.’

_Barbara_ summarises her own understanding of West College’s Business Planning process in the following way:

_Barbara:_ How do we bring in more money, how do we spend less? How do we make sure we hit student targets, so that if we exceed student target numbers then, further down the line, we’re much more likely to be allowed a bigger funding allocation the next time ... which is the biggest sure-fire way to bring in funding through the traditional funding-bodies, but then, in addition to that, there’s the Commercial courses, but International’s also a growth area.

In summary, in articulating their understanding of the annual Business Planning process the CHs foregrounded opportunities to maximise income through the availability of government-funding mechanisms - targets - as a means to generate sufficient revenues via student enrolment numbers, in addition to alternative income-streams; for example, the development and growth of commercial and international programme provision.

**International and Commercial Provision**

Each of the three CHs mentioned the development of both commercial and international provision as an important component of their responsibilities.

_Barbara:_ We’ve been working quite closely with China. We’ve been getting ‘A- Level’ students into the Sixth Form from China and we’re also looking at a collaborative arrangement where we’re going to work with an organisation that delivers out there. The Chinese don’t have enough university places of their own, either in China or Hong Kong, and therefore they want their young people to go to universities abroad.
They understand ‘A’-Level, particularly in Hong Kong. They understand our education system. If they want to get into British universities they see the value of paying for their last two years of secondary school education in order to get them into a British university. So it’s understanding that that made us, as a college, target China and Hong Kong as one of our areas.

In her exposition of the development of what appears to be the potential for a significant institutional relationship with China and Hong Kong, Barbara apparently contradicts her earlier statement where she remarked that, strategically, West College is tightly constrained; such international arrangements facilitating the development of an institutional strategy which suggests considerable scope for college autonomy, beyond its traditional education provision.

In the following interview data, Amanda explains the type and scale of commercial course provision her own Centre provides to local authority and private care home providers, which her Centre continues to develop.

Amanda: There’s a substantial amount of commercial work; they’re not very big earners, but we get a lot of repeat business. We do a lot with the local authority and care homes. So they might have done a course in one of the care homes and they’ll say: ‘Well, you’ve done this for us. Can you think about doing something else?’ The latest one they’ve asked for is Nutrition in Care Homes. We’re looking at developing that, but we do the Lifting and Handling, and other more general ones that their staff need to do.

Like Barbara and Amanda, during interview, Gordon suggests the embryonic state of commercial programmes at West College, remarking on the hierarchical ranking of his own Centre, compared with others, related to prior income-generation:

Gordon: In terms of commercial work, we’re the second biggest earner in the college. And I know I’ve got to grow that figure still further. Last year that brought in about £250,000. I’ve got to increase that next year, so I’ve got to work with other people within the college to identify how we do that. You know, where’s the demand? Where’s the market?

In summary, each Centre-Head was expected to be attentive to opportunities for both Commercial and International course development as a means to generate future revenues for West College and its Centres.
Micropolitics and Self-presentation

The final section draws upon interview data which provides insights into the micropolitics surrounding the Centre-Head position at West College. In the following interview extract, Gordon speaks about how he recognises the need for a Centre-Head’s identity, to some degree, to be ‘maverick-like’, understanding that he and his staff-team are in a ‘competitive situation’: striving to attain the highest Success Rates among West College’s Centres.

Gordon: I think you’ve got to be a bit of a maverick at times, and take chances. You’ve got to live by your decisions, that’s key. At the end of the day, you make decisions, and you’ve got to live with them. At my interview for this job, which was an internal promotion, I remember being asked a question by the principal: ‘Who do you do it for? Do you do it for the Centre, or the College?’ Ultimately, it’s the College but as I said at the time, being totally competitive, it’s for the Centre. So, obviously, for me, it’s a competitive situation. At the end of the year, you want the highest Success Rates.

Amanda articulates the requirement for CHs to be adept with data and unhesitating during meetings when called to account by West College’s Executive Team.

Amanda: You definitely need to be good with the numbers, the data. With the Exec you have to be decisive. You know, in a meeting, you might be asked something there and then, what your thoughts are. And it’s about being able to make a decision and respond quickly.

In terms of the ability to influence critical decisions at West College, Barbara remarks on the length of time it took to comprehend the micro-politics surrounding her CH position at West College; learning the ways in which decisions are made, and by whom. Moreover, she states that it is not possible to know what the position of CH entails until it is actually experienced.

Barbara: I think until you’re actually in the role, you don’t know, you can’t know, what it involves. So although I was a Deputy Centre-manager, as it was then, I didn’t really have an appreciation of what a Centre-Head involved. I think it took me a couple of years to have a good understanding of other people, and their perceptions of me; to work out the politics, how decisions are made and who has the final say. And how to make sure that what I want is heard, and taken into account, in those final decisions.
In summary, in carrying out their Centre-Head roles, each was acutely aware of their accountability to West College’s Executive; an Executive which, for Barbara, for a significant period of time, appeared opaque in its decision-making arrangements.

**Discussion**

The following discussion section examines the extent to which the three middle-managers are discursively captured (Gillies 2013) through the disciplining technology of West College’s SP document; linking Foucauldian archaeological and genealogical analyses to formulate an understanding of middle-management identity and working practices.

*Data-metrics* feature prominently within all six themed headings of the genealogical analysis, from the ways in which each Centre-Head (CH) articulates their role, to the ways they speak about their micro-political personal interactions with West College’s ‘Exec’ - the institution’s Senior Management Team. For instance, Gordon speaks about how monthly performance-monitoring meetings, covering his entire role, are understood and explained through a significant reliance on *data-metrics*, while Amanda articulates the need to be ‘good with the numbers’. Similarly, Barbara, when speaking about the college’s annual business planning process, states the requirement for her Centre to ‘hit student targets’. Hence, the genealogical analysis strongly suggests that each of the CHs governs, and is governed by, a regime of numbers; a ‘resource through which surveillance can be exercised’ (Ozga 2008, cited in Ball 2013, p.103); and where each of the middle-managers can be recognised as pre-occupied by, and with, *data-metrics*.

Indeed, in recognising the *SP document* as a ‘regime of numbers’, focusing on those inscribed *KPIs* which, ontologically, underpin West College’s nine *SOs*, and which total 29, each announces a specifically required value e.g. ‘Achieve the College retention target of 91%’ (*SO1, KPI-3*); the aforementioned specific *data metric* being the benchmark for learner retention *at any level of analysis*: individual programme, particular course level, specific curriculum area, individual centre and, ultimately, West College as a whole. For instance, if a particular *level* does not achieve the specified 91% retention target, then at least one particular course *programme* at
that *level*, necessarily, must be below the calculated performance metric. This is articulated by *Amanda* when she remarks:

> For every Learner Withdrawal I would calculate what that means for the Retention Figures. And then, if it’s a Level Two programme, what that would mean for our Level Two data, *overall*. I’m monitoring that *all of the time*.[Emphases added]

Clearly, *Amanda* is pre-occupied with data in her work; calculating how each individual programme change impinges upon her Centre’s *aggregate data values*, relative to those expected benchmarks inscribed within the college’s SP document. However, such privileging of data and the implications of them, at *any level of analysis*, suggest particular implications for *social relations* at West College and the ways in which CHs manage their staff. For instance, *Gordon* speaks about managing his staff ‘in conjunction with targets which are set by the Executive’, while *Barbara* explains how she monitors ‘what’s going on in my Centre’ by ‘looking at the data … and talking to people about any slippages.’ Consequently, *data-metrics*, as specified and inscribed within the SP document, serve not only as performance measures by which Centres are rendered knowable, they fasten institutional social interactions.

In fact, during interview, *Amanda* remarked:

> I’ve done some sessions on data to the staff; just little things, like showing them the impact of a couple of withdrawals. I did a whole Data Task for them where I got them working out Retention and Success.

The above articulation demonstrates how *Amanda* ensures that her centre-staff are proficient in attending to data; are able to recognise its significance, as well as being cognizant of the implications of specific data permutations. In so doing, through her management *practices*, a specific discursive *object* emerges: a ‘Data Task’; whereby such an *object* and associated *practices* can be understood ‘as [having been] constituted by the rules of discourse themselves’ (*Armstrong* 1994, p.28); an *object* which *Amanda* independently devised.

While Amanda’s interview-extracts offer striking examples of the prominence of *data-metrics* as the focus of her middle-management work, suggesting the extent to which she is pre-occupied by them, analyses of West College’s Strategic Plan and interview data demonstrates a significant relationship between the institution’s SP
document and the working practices of all three CHs; a relationship that is unequivocal.

**Summary**

In summarising how those data from West College enable this study’s research questions to be addressed, I wish to focus particularly on that question which is concerned with how the working practices of the middle-manager are influenced by institutional policy; specifically the college’s SP document.

The SP document, I propose, is constructed in two distinct ways: firstly, as an assemblage of *broad statements*, expressed using a series of positive expressions, acting as a device to facilitate institutional consent; a form of governance which ‘involves particular ways of using language’ (Fairclough 2000, p.145) that creates a ‘shared sense of direction’ (O’Connell 2005). Secondly, by using *definitive statements*, containing *precisely-calculated* values, whereby such a shared sense is not merely an impression, or feeling, it yields a specific performative technology; ‘a mode of regulation’ employing judgements, comparisons and displays to incentivise and control (Ball 2003). Moreover, the SP document, in the exactitude of its *Key Performance Indicators*, is both a calculative and territorializing instrument (Mennicken and Miller 2012), that produces particular middle-management identities in the form of ‘the governable person’ (Miller and O’Leary 1987).

However, such a governable person does not imply a ‘docile body’ whose freedom to act is over-determined, but a ‘disciplined subject’ within a specific ‘political anatomy’; a political anatomy which Foucault (1975) recognises as a ‘mechanics of power’, within which, individuals exercise autonomy. This is perhaps best illustrated when Gordon speaks in terms of being ‘a bit of a maverick’ and the requirement for him ‘to take chances’; that in being a Centre-Head ‘you’ve got to live by your decisions’. It is further exemplified in Barbara’s work in her shaping of West College’s international partnerships and the development of innovative pedagogy in her Centre. Moreover, it is evident within Amanda’s working practices when she formulates and presents what she refers to as a ‘Data Task’ to her teaching-staff; ensuring they are cognizant of the significance of *data-metrics*, and proficient in their calculation. Indeed, in so doing, Amanda not only elucidates her own
distinctive middle-management practices, she evinces those ‘humble and mundane mechanisms’ which, according to Miller and Rose (2008) ‘make it possible to govern’ (p.32).

Consequently, in formulating understandings of middle-management identity, as evidenced by each of the CHs at West College, it is apparent that sufficient attention should be given to the idiosyncratic ways they exercise autonomy, while remaining alert to how such idiosyncrasies are directed towards those institutional instruments which territorialize their capacities to act; yielding middle-management practices that are distinguished by a preoccupation with data-metrics.
Chapter Eight
The Curriculum-based Middle-manager case: a Meta-analysis

Introduction
In this chapter I seek to write a genealogy of middle-management practices based on the totality of interview data generated by the nine middle-manager cases. It is primarily a genealogical analysis (supported by a Foucauldian archaeology) as my three research questions are located around FE Middle-manager identity; an identity informed by those specific practices articulated during research interviews, and where such practices can be traced, or ‘mapped’ (Deleuze 1992), to institutional statements in the form of strategic plan documents. As writers make clear (e.g. Lumby 1997, Page 2011a), the published research relating to FE is not extensive, resulting in a limited insight into the English FE middle-manager; in terms of specific middle-management quotidian working practices, even less so. In writing a genealogy of middle-management practices I seek to address this situation; contributing to knowledge, specifically, about the identity and work of English FE college middle-managers, as well as contributing to knowledge about the FE sector more generally.

The Further Education Middle-manager

Turning to the focus of my genealogical analysis, while McTavish’s (2006) own research publication is not about the FE middle-manager he acknowledges their instrumentality in the successful operation of FE colleges:

...[i]t has been shown that middle managers in colleges play a significant role, sometimes under-appreciated, in mediating between professional, managerial and college-wide interests (Gleeson and Shain 1999; Gleeson, 2001; Leader, 2004). In this sense the actual processes involved in day-to-day activities of managers ... are at least as important as the formal rational plans and activities categorized as strategic management. (p.414) [Emphases added]

However, in seeking to recognise the importance of those ‘day-to-day activities of managers’, as articulated by McTavish (2006, p.414), and which can plausibly be understood as contributing to a body of knowledge about FE middle-management work, it is also worth considering the time elapsed since the publication of those
relatively few literatures that are cited by interested researchers in the field; for example, Alexiadou (2001), and Gleeson and Shain (1999). Additionally, the thick layer of middle-management in English FE colleges (Coffield 2012) presents further difficulties for the researcher as ‘the middle’ constitutes a particular expanse within which ‘the middle-manager’ is located; and is further influenced by specific institutional hierarchical arrangements. Noting the heterogeneity of job titles, which further reflects differing hierarchical positions within the middle-management layer, Gleeson and Shain (1999) observe:

The term ‘middle manager’ is employed to denote a diverse group commonly referred to within FE as ‘middle management’. Specifically, within their various institutions, they are known by one of the following broad titles: programme manager, programme developer, co-ordinator, head of school, sector head or programme leader. (p.462)

In attempts to account for the different hierarchical positions within my own particular study this is largely addressed by selecting middle-manager cases where each is located at one of three discernible hierarchical positions: senior middle-management, middle middle-management and lower middle-management; their job titles, respectively, being: Centre-Head, Programme Manager and Curriculum Manager. Three middle-managers at each of these specific positions were interviewed; each position being restricted to a single college context e.g. those senior middle-managers interviewed were all employed in the same institution. All nine middle-managers’ work included in my study were primarily focused around Curriculum and Learning Provision unlike Briggs’ (2005) who also includes service-based middle-managers, such as those found in Estates or Learner Services functions. Additionally, each institution’s Strategic Plan document was analysed, where I deployed a Foucauldian archaeological analysis rooted in a method devised by Kendall and Wickham (1999). In doing so, my research study seeks to explore the relationship between institutional statements and middle-management practices.

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49 Alexiadou (2001) and Gleeson and Shain’s (1999) publications foreground those changes to the FE context and the impact on institutional working cultures as a result of ‘Incorporation’ following the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, which came into force on April 1st 1993. This is now well over 20 years ago.

50 Briggs work is primarily focused around the role and function of the FE Middle-manager.
**Meta-analysis of Further Education Middle-management practices**

In the following section I provide a meta-analysis of the text and oral data and in doing so I intend to foreground middle-management *practices*; practices which can be conceived in terms of their similarity (as well as the diversity of ways such a similarities are realised) across the expanse of the middle-tier of those middle-manager cases of my research study: senior, middle and lower.

In recognising these similarities in middle-management practices, I consider it apposite to refer to Foucault (1975), who writes about a ‘political anatomy’ (p.138); a ‘new micro-physics of power’ (p.139) whose origins he traces to the seventeenth century and which, he claims, has ‘constantly reached out to ever broader domains, as if they intended to cover the entire social body’ (p.139). Such a ‘political anatomy’ is characterised, according to Foucault, by a corpus of disciplinary techniques and mechanisms:

> It is rather a multiplicity of often minor processes, of different origin and scattered location, which overlap, repeat, or imitate one another, distinguish themselves from one another according to their domain of application, converge and gradually produce the blueprint of a general method. (Foucault 1975, p.138)

Such a ‘micro-physics of power’ manifested through ‘a multiplicity of minor processes’ can be considered to be understood as the practice of, and subjection to, a diverse yet complementary gamut of *disciplinary techniques*. Appearing to confirm Foucault’s assertion that such a political anatomy has perpetually reached out and, indeed, continues to imbue the social body in its more contemporary forms, citing Foucault, Stephen Ball recognises a “swarming of disciplinary mechanisms” (Foucault 1979 cited in Ball 2013, p.141) when writing about the ways in which he and fellow scholars are subject to the demands and prescriptions of the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF) in ‘mundane, repetitive and methodical ways’. (Ball 2013, p.141) Still further, Ball (2013) recognises such demands and prescriptions under the rubric of ‘performativity’ whose essence is to make ourselves ‘calculable rather than memorable’ (p.136) where ‘experience is nothing, productivity is everything’ (p.136).

It is such disciplinary, and disciplin-*ing*, mechanisms and techniques, manifested in the working practices of the middle-manager cases, to which I now turn. In doing so,
I will draw attention to a specific key theme which I have identified within the middle-manager interview data and which I recognise as a unifying feature of FE middle-management practices. I recognise this as the overarching theme which imbues their work. Having outlined this overarching theme, I intend to show that its origins can be found in the Strategic Plan documents of each of the three colleges in my study; acting as a disciplinary mechanism which steers and influences their work.

**Overarching Theme – Disciplining Metrics**

Following Foucault (1975), the overarching theme from the corpus of data produced through interviews, and drawn from institutional strategic plans, I shall refer to as ‘disciplining metrics’. In this section I now draw upon these data to explicate my argument that it is such disciplining metrics which preoccupy the FE middle-managers in the course of their routine working practices.

**The FE Middle-manager’s working practices – a preoccupation with data-metrics**

In discussing their senior middle-management roles, all three Centre-Heads at West College make explicit reference to specific aspects of data that they understand as critical to their working practices. Gordon mentions not only the requirement to control costs through the management of budgetary data but also the achievement of success, achievement and retention rates associated with his centre’s learning programmes. Moreover, he mentions these in terms of specific targets, set by the college’s Executive.

Likewise, Barbara states: ‘I spend a lot of time monitoring what’s going on in my Centre.’ In terms of her working practices she articulates this as ‘looking at the data, seeing where we are and talking to people about any slippages.’ Thus, for Barbara, in formulating understandings of her centre, she privileges the scrutiny of particular forms of data; a working practice that informs subsequent activities; for example, talking to her staff about particular ‘data situations’ when she becomes cognizant of them, referring to these situations as ‘slippages’. Such a practice is suitably exemplified by Amanda who, similarly, states: ‘A key priority is keeping my eye on

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51 The italicisation of speech throughout this section is to draw attention to these particular middle-manager utterances for the purposes of foregrounding their specific actions and practices and is not intended to signify the ways in which middle-managers emphasised words while speaking.
the data.’ She continues: ‘For every Learner Withdrawal I would calculate what that means for the Retention Figures.’ Thus, for Amanda, too, a fundamental practice is the repeated scrutiny of her centre’s learning programme data as well as calculating the effects of particular ‘data situations’ on her centre’s data targets.

Considering those middle-managers at the next hierarchical level i.e. the middle-middle at East College, like the centre-heads at West College, each foregrounded specific aspects of data in their working practices. For example, Monica states: ‘The key activities focus on retention and achievement [data]. Everything we do is around that.’ While Nigel remarks: ‘We want high success rates’. Concurring with Monica and Nigel, Louise, when asked about the predominant organisational themes that affect her role, remarks: ‘The predominant theme is success. Everything we do is about success. It’s about success rates. It’s about the learner coming here, staying with us and achieving. That’s how simple it is.’

Paying attention next to the lower-middle-management layer at Central College, echoing Monica’s utterances at East College, Dave, a curriculum manager, asserts: ‘The main concern is success rates’; while, similarly, Matthew comments: ‘A key theme for us is, massively, success rates; success.’ Finally, Harry remarks: ‘We have targets. And to meet those targets we need to ensure the learner stays on-programme and succeeds; completes the year and passes everything they’re given; it’s that basic.’

Consequently, from the interview data generated, whereby each of the middle-manager cases spoke about those ‘key themes’ that were crucial to their work, it is clear that across the three discernible layers: senior, middle and lower, at West College, East College and Central College, respectively, there are explicitly recognisable unifying aspects in each of the nine middle-manager’s articulations, namely, the centrality of data-metrics and their continuous scrutiny and calculability. To articulate this plainly, while remaining mindful of Tamboukou’s (1999) genealogist whose telos, she proposes, is to make clear ‘how practices are’, the middle-managers in this study can be understood to be preoccupied with data-metrics. Indeed, both Louise and Harry, although working at separate colleges, and different middle-management levels, articulate their respective foci and working
practices around data in almost identical ways when they conclude their remarks about ‘learner success and achievement’: Louise stating ‘That’s how simple it is,’ while Harry remarks ‘it’s that basic.’

The Strategic Plan document - a Regime of Disciplining Metrics

At this juncture I will now draw attention to those individual archaeological analyses that I carried out in chapters Five, Six and Seven; recognising this, too, as a meta-analysis of the college strategic plan documents. In doing so, such SP documents and their inscribed statements can be understood as those external conditions that determine the specific knowledges to which the middle-manager is subject, and how their specific practices are tied to such knowledges (Tamboukou 1999). Consequently, the SP document can plausibly be conceived as both a territorialising instrument (Mennicken and Miller 2012) and a discursive regime (Tamboukou 1999); yielding particular middle-manager identities and ways of working.

Commencing the archaeological meta-analysis by focusing on apposite data drawn from the three college contexts, I wish to draw attention to those particular disciplining metrics associated with specific Learning Programmes, as inscribed within each of the college’s SP documents, and how these metrics inform the working practices of the college middle-managers. Learning programmes are a particular focus of attention as the middle-managers in my study are primarily curriculum-based.

As I commented in Chapter Seven, in formulating SP documents within which definitive statements are inscribed, containing precisely-calculated values, a specific performative technology (Ball 2003) is realised; a performative technology to which those middle-managers within each of the colleges are made subject. For example: Key Performance Indicator reference (iv), specified for the purposes of the realisation of West College’s Strategic Objective One (‘Set high expectations to promote the consistent achievement of aspirational learning goals’) announces:

Achieve the College success rate targets of 86% for 16-18 years olds on long qualifications.
Similarly, East College’s SP document, though using the referent ‘Key Milestone’ (rather than KPI), under the heading of Quality of Provision, is inscribed as follows:

Improve 16-18 and 19+ long learner success rates overall by 1% or 82% whichever is higher.

Likewise, Central College’s SP document, using the referent ‘Current strategic priorities (goals)’ announces:

To maintain an excellent success rate of 80% or above with high levels of both retention and achievement.

In analysing the three college’s stipulated success rate metrics it is evident that they are, relative to each other, within a range of six percentage points in terms of those specific values announced for 16-18 full time long courses, the core provision of each of the three colleges: West College 86% for 16-18 long courses, East College 82% or higher and Central College 80%+. While the values specified are numerically precise, there is, additionally, scope for them to be higher still: for example, East College specifies 1% or 82% whichever is higher. Thus, if the previous year’s success rate for a course was 84% then the expectation is that such success rates should improve the following year, by at least one percentage point. Consequently, those values inscribed within each of the college’s respective SP documents can be considered to be minimum levels of attainment.

As evidenced from the selection of those separate SP document statements above, as well as those additional statements found in each of the college’s individual SP documents, which announce whole groups of data-metrics (for instance, West College’s SP document contains 28 further KPI metrics, some of which further sub-divide into the stipulation of five further data-metrics), it is evident that those middle-managers whose management work involves responsibilities in specific relation to the provision of learning programmes, within the English FE college context, are subject to a ‘regime of numbers’ (Ozga 2008). Indeed, this is also the case for FE college teaching staff (for example, see Fort 2010b, 2011). However, I propose that it is especially the case for the middle-manager position within the English FE college, particularly when considering Briggs’ (2005) observations from her study of 45 middle-managers where, crucially, she recognises the middle-manager’s ‘most visible feature’ (p.33) to be that of ‘implementer’; tasked with
‘making it happen’ (p.32) [Emphasis added] and where middle-management work ‘entails carrying out college policy’ (p.33).

Considering the middle-manager’s role of ‘implementer’, Page (2011a) concurs with Briggs (2005), in his study of 27 First Tier Managers (an institutional position which my study recognises as the lower middle-manager), observing: ‘the first tier manager can be seen as the final implementer, translating policy in a learning environment’. (Page 2011a, p.102) [Emphases added] Both Page and Briggs’ observations are particularly useful to my own study when plausibly conceiving the Strategic Plan Document as the most prominent instance of formulated college policy.

Finally, such a regime of numbers is yet further especially significant for the college middle-manager, specifically as a regime as, unlike teaching staff who are primarily focused on individual learning programmes, they are responsible for entire curriculum area provisions in their colleges; amplifying the effects of those strategic plan statements that announce specific disciplining-metrics; disciplining-metrics which apply to a whole hierarchy of aggregate levels e.g. Curriculum Centre/Area, Level Three programmes, Level Two programmes and so on.

Plausibly, those regimes of numbers inscribed in each of their respective college SP documents, Ball (2010) would recognise as rendering each of the middle-managers as ‘legible’. Moreover, he argues that: ‘At the level of institutional relations and individual working practices these legibilities work through the technologies of performativity’ (p.125) and that ‘performativity “works” most powerfully when it is inside our heads and souls’ (p.125). From the consistent references made by the nine middle-managers, as indicated in the earlier section above, where I argue that each of them is preoccupied by data-metrics, it is evident that they are acutely aware of their ‘legibility’, understanding their work in these terms. This is further apparent in the following genealogical analysis.

**The Disciplined Middle-Manager - Working practices and Data-metrics**

Having focused attention upon the similarities among the colleges’ strategic plan statements, specifically, those disciplining metrics associated with their core provision and particular expressed success rates, to maintain a focus on the practices
of the college middle-managers I again draw from the interview-data generated. In doing so I wish to make clear the disciplining effects of the SP document on their work, rendering a genealogical analysis which, as Tamboukou (1999) proposes, simply shows how their practices are, as well as the origins of such practices.

Evincing the ways in which centre-head *Amanda* recognises her own legibility, she remarks:

*I probably do enjoy working with data, so I probably do it more than I need to. For every Learner Withdrawal I would calculate what that means for the Retention Figures. And then, if it’s a Level Two programme, what that would mean for our Level Two data, overall. I’m monitoring that all of the time.*

Indeed, the very existence of the discursive objects ‘Learner Withdrawal’ and ‘Retention Figures’, mentioned in her interview extract, indicate the discursive regime in which *Amanda* is enmeshed when carrying out her work; a discursive regime which is governed by those disciplining metrics inscribed within West College’s SP document.

Moreover, a Learner Withdrawal is not only a discursive object about which individuals can speak, it is, additionally, a particular institutional practice, whereby the object about which people can speak is, simultaneously, a practice which people can do. However, such a specific practice bears particular significance through those formal institutional procedures that must necessarily be invoked in the transformation of a learner’s status from ‘Active’ to ‘Withdrawn’; procedures effected via specific administrative staff who possess the requisite authority to process ‘withdrawals’; once the necessary checks have been made and the pertinent college documentation has the necessary approvals, as indicated by particular inscribed signatures.

In fact, so important is the process of Learner Withdrawals, as recognised by *Amanda*, that she explained during interview:

*Every single Learner Withdrawal comes through me. I sign all the “W” Forms. I prefer that, so I know there are no surprises at the end. You know, ‘Oh gosh! We’ve had ten withdrawals and I didn’t know!’*
Noticeably, such a practice of the overseeing of Learner Withdrawals, articulated by Amanda, is replicated identically at East College, evidenced when Louise similarly states:

Before they withdraw anybody, they [the teaching staff] have to come and see me and explain why they are being withdrawn. And I think that’s just become so matter-of-fact now.

In their practices of overseeing the processing of Learner Withdrawals, both Amanda and Louise are able to assess the likely impact on, respectively, their centre and curriculum-area Retention Figures, not only at a specific course level, but also how such withdrawals will likely impact on their aggregated Retention Figures; Retention Figures which directly impact on calculated Success Rates. This is articulated by Amanda in providing a rationale for her practice:

The Programme Managers who lead the courses are very good at managing their own data. And they would know if they’d lost somebody, but they don’t have the bigger picture that if you lose another Level Two, we might drop from this time last year on Level Two, and it’s things like that as to why I need to have a hand in it as well.

Likewise, Louise states:

The team know they’re responsible for their success; that they’re accountable for it. But if there are any problems, they need to come and tell me straight away. I always say I’d rather know than get a shock at the end of the year that everything seems okay with Retention and then all of a sudden you’ve got to withdraw five people. I’d rather know upfront and let’s do something to put it right.’

In summary, from those interview-data generated by both Amanda at West College, and Louise at East College, their working practices are, evidently, tied to those legibilities inscribed in their respective institution’s SP documents; specifically those inscribed disciplining metrics which underpin the realisation of each of their colleges’ more broadly stated strategic objectives.

Moreover, those disciplining metrics that possess significance for Amanda and Louise similarly impact on Matthew at Central College; evinced when he explains that an A-Level student, after completing their first year, elected to pursue a BTEC Level Three programme, ensuring that the two year A-Level Achievement and

52 Success Rates are calculated by multiplying Achievement by Retention. For example, 90% Achievement x 90% Retention yields an 81% Success Rate value.
Retention data-metrics (and consequently Success rates) would be adversely affected. Matthew referred to this as ‘a sideways move’ which he recognised as being understood, by his senior managers, as unwelcome:

A sideways move is probably not a negative thing, but senior management don’t see it that way. Personally, if a student has decided that a different route for them is the right thing, then I think that’s a positive outcome. But it’s seen to be less positive as far as senior management are concerned. They want progression, with positive value-added. It’s affecting the data, and it’s affecting the push for ‘Outstanding Plus’.

Matthew recognises in the case he cites, that the particular student’s choice is, from a senior management perspective, in specific tension with those numeric Success Rate values his college is expected to achieve for that year.

Furthermore, in formulating his own understandings of those senior managers at Central College, to whom he is accountable (both indirectly through his own Curriculum Area Manager as well as, on occasion, directly) Matthew recognises that they, too, privilege data; mindful of the potential negative consequences, for the college, if ‘the data’ is deficient in terms of expected values. To use Matthew’s words: ‘affecting the push for’, what he terms ‘Outstanding Plus’ (a non-existent and invented Ofsted grading category). By articulating such a scenario, Matthew alludes to an apparent void which plausibly exists between Central College’s senior management and those students enrolled on its learning programmes; that it is college data that are the former’s primary concern.

Consequently, such an explication suggests some of the pressures Matthew is likely to experience when providing guidance to students about their future choices, when carrying out his tutoring role; knowing that if he ‘loses a student’ he will be expected to account for such a loss. Such accountability, and the practice of accounting for them, is epitomised by Harry, also a lower middle-manager at Central College:

So if I lose a learner, for instance, I have to keep a database now, and I’ve got to say where every learner that leaves has gone to. So I’m just keeping a rolling spreadsheet of everyone who’s enrolled and has now left. And I’ve got to feed that back. Why they’ve gone. Where have they gone to? So, it’s not just a case of them leaving, I’ve got to know why they’ve left.
In carrying out his work, as a result, Harry’s middle-management practices include the setting up and maintenance of what he refers to as ‘a database’; providing an audit-trail that specifically records every single instance of a learner-loss, serving as an aide-memoire in order that he can recall the reasons for such losses in the future. Harry makes clear his understanding of his own specific legibility when he states: ‘if I lose a learner’; recognising the loss of learner as attributable to him.

Furthermore, Harry acknowledges his accountability when he states: ‘I’ve got to say where every learner that leaves has gone’. In doing so, Foucault’s micro-physics of power through the disciplining technique of the confession is evoked which, according to Foucault (1976), Western societies have established as one of the main rituals, or practices, relied upon for the production of truth: ‘The confession has spread its effects far and wide. It plays a part in justice, medicine, education ... in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life.’ (Foucault 1976, p.59) Thus, in Foucauldian terms, Harry when uttering that he has ‘got to say’ understands that he is obligated to do so: to acknowledge and account for what he has done, as well as, plausibly, what he has ‘failed to do’53, in the disciplining ritual of ‘the examination’ (Foucault 1975). A ritual which places him in a field of surveillance whereby Harry can be ‘described, judged, measured, [and] compared with others’. (Foucault 1975, p.191)

Finally, Gordon, a senior-middle-manager at West College, like Harry at Central College, further substantiates these middle-management confessional practices at his own monthly Performance Monitoring Meetings where he, too, is subject to the ritual of examination, by his college’s senior management team, speaking about his repeated explanation and justification to them, over the course of several of such meetings, about the loss of a number of learners from a specific cohort; having to repeat the same justification until, to use his words: ‘the message gets across’. In the requirement for him to keep repeating the same information, the void between the college’s senior management team and the college’s students, to which I alluded in Matthew’s case at Central College above, is further suggested; West College’s senior managers consistently forgetting Gordon’s explanations that the students had ‘disappeared’ during Year One, at their previous meetings:

I’ve got to go to the Performance Monitoring Meeting with a reason right from Day One that because of non-progressing students [from Year One to Year Two] who had gone because of some issues last year; they disappeared last year. For those Year Two courses, you can’t get them back. So if you lose 17 off one course what do you do? But I’ve got to be able to justify that each month and keep saying the same thing until the message gets across. I can’t do anything else about it. There’s no point re-visiting it every month, and them saying: ‘That’s down and that’s down.’ ‘Yes, I know. But I’ve mentioned that at every meeting for the last three months. These are the statistics.’

Thus, for Gordon, like Harry, he must be attentive to, and have intimate knowledge of those data-metrics which fall within his remit. Moreover, Gordon’s interview-data illustrates, further, that such intimate knowledge must be maintained once a justification has been provided; Gordon repeatedly having to provide the same justification, due to West College’s senior management failure to recollect his previous explanations about a particular set of data-metrics. While Gordon didn’t mention during interview, like Harry, that he kept ‘a rolling spreadsheet’, given the requirement for him to be repeatedly obliged to provide explanations, about his data, it is likely that he has devised a method by which he is able to recollect such details, particularly given the number of learning programmes under his scope of responsibility, which he estimated as ‘more than 200’: from Level 1 to Level 3 programmes, across a range of diverse curriculum areas, and which include full-time, part-time and apprenticeship programmes.

In foregrounding those middle-management practices above, which are drawn from the corpus of the study, as a whole, and which contribute to a genealogical meta-analysis, it is clear that across each of the three FE college contexts, at each of the three middle-management levels: senior, middle and lower; management practices cohere around data; data which I recognise as disciplining metrics; inscribed within the middle-managers’ respective college SP documents. In focusing their practices around such disciplining metrics, the middle-managers in my study can be understood as ‘aligned with what is expected of them’. (Gillies 2013, p.59)

The Disciplining Middle-Manager – Managing and interacting with staff

In the following section I focus on those middle-management practices which demonstrate some of the ways the nine middle-manager cases interact with their
staffs in the course of their management of them. This is specifically important to my study, as FE middle-managers, in occupying a management role, necessarily, are required to manage and interact with their staff.

Significantly, Briggs (2005) observes that the role of ‘staff manager’ complements the middle-management role of ‘implementer’, of which the latter, she argues, is the FE middle-manager’s ‘most visible feature’ (p.33). She proposes that, together, these two roles facilitate the achievement of the middle-manager’s ‘corporate function,’ which includes the implementation of college strategy. Significantly, Briggs (2005) observes that those middle-managers in her study adopted a largely intuitive approach to the management of their staff, while Page (2011a) similarly notes that among those First-Tier Managers in his own study who ‘most readily identified themselves as managers’ (p.115) there was ‘little consistency of management styles’ (p.116).

Finally, in drawing attention to the ways that each of them spoke about their interactions with, and management of, staff and which like Briggs (2005) and Page (2011a) can plausibly be construed as both largely intuitive and lacking consistency, I nevertheless seek to show how their staff-management practices are influenced and steered by their respective SP documents; whereby such practices can be recognised specifically as disciplining practices that are unified; coalescing around data-metrics, either as specifically precise numbers or, in the form of more broadly stated objectives, where terms such as ‘growth’ and ‘development’ are inscribed.

I report the following section in a descending hierarchical arrangement, starting at the senior middle-management level at West College, followed by the middle middle-managers at East College, concluding with those lower middle-managers at Central College.

The Disciplining Manager – Staff-management at West College

In demonstrating some of the ways Amanda interacted and managed her staff she wanted them to understand the implications of data-metrics in the course of their work, either as teachers or managers:
I’ve done some sessions on data to the staff; just little things, like *showing them the impact of a couple of withdrawals. I did a whole Data Task for them where I got them working out Retention and Success.*

In making these statements it is apparent that a specific **discursive object** is ontologically realised – a ‘Data Task’; an object which emerges within the field of Amanda’s middle-management practices and which she uses as a **disciplining mechanism** to ensure her staff recognise the criticality of data; what Amanda refers to as ‘managing their own data’. Moreover, in creating the Data Task activity, she relays and reinforces the knowledge about her own **specific middle-management practices** when she articulated during interview: ‘*For every Learner Withdrawal I would calculate what that means* for the Retention Figures.’ Thus, for Amanda, every change in data results in her **practice of calculating its implications**: i.e. ‘what that means’. By creating the ‘Data Task’ it is reasonable to conclude that she is attempting to replicate such **calculating practices** in the routine practices of her staff, in both the teachers as well as those Curriculum Area middle-managers whom she manages.

Similarly, Gordon in explaining how various systems which record and process data, both centrally and within West College’s centres, results in inconsistencies within these data across the college, due to transmission delays between various departments as well as updating frequencies about which he is unclear, remarks: ‘*We tend to use a lot of our own data in here, I’ll be honest.*’ In articulating the use of ‘his own data’ Gordon demonstrates that, ultimately, he places his trust in those data which he can source within his own centre, which he perceives as being more likely to be accurate than those which are distributed across the college. Gordon evinces the sourcing of his own data when he recounts a specific interaction with a staff-member:

> If we’re being performance-monitored once a month, when I go to the meeting, I want to make sure that what I’ve got is right. And no matter where we get it from, whether it’s a conversation with the Teaching Assistant and saying: “Right, Barry, where are we up to with these Apprentices? How many have we actually got on-board? Cos this tells me this.” And he’ll say: “No, we’ve got these, these and these.” And then I’ve got to go to Exec at the meeting and say: “This is what we’ve actually got, that report’s wrong.” So, I’ve got to go armed. Sometimes I’ll get the
CAMs [Curriculum Area Managers] to do it. You know, “You need to find this out.”

In recollecting such interactions with staff, with both a Teaching Assistant (a relatively junior position) and his own CAMs (a relatively senior position), Gordon illustrates a concern for data that permeates the entire hierarchy of those staff who he manages. Moreover, in the practice of checking the accuracy of data in conjunction, and personally, with his own staff, it is plausibly made evident to those staff, that data-metrics are to be considered as highly significant, given Gordon’s senior status. No doubt, Gordon could task such practices of checking the data to one of his administrators, but he chooses to either check the data himself, or he instructs those management staff, immediately below his own position, to check them. Thus, Gordon, while he doesn’t speak in terms of the practice of the Data Task, like Amanda, he speaks instead about the practice of checking the data with his staff. Consequently, for both Amanda and Gordon, it is clear that significant staff-management practices, as well as staff-interactions, are focused around data-metrics.

Barbara, in demonstrating her own particular staff-management practices recognises the A-Level centre that she manages as: ‘a little more like a school’; also reflected in the way she explains her centre is presented externally, by the college’s Marketing function. Barbara remarks:

There is a bit more direct management of the teaching staff. There are lots of occasions where I am head-teacher: head-teacher for the students, head-teacher for the staff. Staff, students, parents; they all understand it. I probably end-up dealing with more student and staff problems than other centre-heads in the vocational areas.

Barbara in recognising her A Level centre as having a different identity to the rest of the college, and where she remarked that her centre produced its own separate prospectus, while appearing to be less data focused than Amanda and Gordon, goes on to speak in terms of the ‘Ofsted agenda’ as similarly articulated by Matthew, a lower middle-manager within an A-Level department at Central College:

A lot of the things that we’ve been developing, in terms of Teaching and Learning, we’ve probably been a bit ahead of the rest of the college. And it’s almost felt as though we’ve been reined back at times. What will Ofsted think if they come in and we’ve got this fantastic work going on in
one area and nobody else even knows about it? My argument is always: ‘We can’t wait! Somebody’s got to innovate.’

However, notwithstanding those ‘indicators of performance’ as demanded by Ofsted (Ball 1997) it is clear that Barbara’s practices are certainly significantly data-centric when she mentioned, at the start of the interview, that she spent ‘a lot of time monitoring’ her centre’s data and talking to people about ‘slippages’. While Barbara doesn’t cite particular data metric values in the specific interview-data above, she alludes to a competitive situation existing between those centres at West College, speaking also in terms of ‘we’, potentially recognising a team ethos within her centre. How democratic such a ‘we’ is, however, is not clear, particularly when Barbara speaks more managerially, articulating: ‘There’s a bit more direct management of the teaching staff’. She continued further:

I suppose with managing staff it’s being able to draw the lines, make sure people understand why they’re there, particularly in terms of staff contracts and working conditions; to be strong and able to hold the line.

Thus, for Barbara the practice of managing her staff includes the practice of making clear to them the expectations of their roles, and being ‘strong’, while she also claims that her A-Level centre is more advanced than the rest of the college, describing their pedagogic work using adjectives such as ‘fantastic’ and ‘innovative’, plausibly reflecting a recognition and valuing of her centre’s academic rather than vocational focus. Moreover, in additionally understanding her position as ‘head-teacher’, it is evident that Barbara appears to recognise her management identity in terms of leadership, and being a leader. As Briggs (2005) observes:

Leadership at middle manager level is more likely to be encouraged under senior manager leadership that is transformational, which encourages dispersed leadership through stimulating followers to adopt new perspectives on their work and improving awareness of the collective vision or mission. (p.42) [Emphases added]

Appearing to corroborate Briggs’ (2005) claim that dispersed leadership is facilitated by transformational senior leadership, Barbara spoke about having the support of West College’s principal in developing her centre’s separate identity when she remarked: ‘the backing of the principal is very important. The principal understands it. The principal gets it.’ In identifying herself as ‘head-teacher’ there is evidence that Barbara is able to exercise a significant degree of autonomy; a particular form of
autonomy potentially less available to those vocational Centre-Heads at West College and which serves to strengthen her leadership identity.

The Disciplining Manager – Staff-management at East College

Turning attention to those middle managers at East College, Monica makes clear the expectation of her teaching staff to be directly involved in the establishment of new learning programmes, which she articulates in terms of the practice of generating ‘business’:

I’ve had to ask some of them to attend The Family Learning Day at a local school. We’re trying to get parents to engage in English and Maths. ‘So, let’s go, because that’s potentially about growth in your area. It’s about bringing your business in.’

In providing her explanation, Monica imagines she is speaking to her teaching staff, relating to them that they are expected to ‘grow their areas’; utterances that reflect East College’s SP document which, under the rubric of ‘Responsive Service’, states: ‘Develop new curriculum at all levels in response to local, regional and national priorities’; English and Maths being a particular priority at national level as announced in the government’s ‘Review of Vocational Education’ (DfE 2011).

Likewise, Louise, also reflecting East College’s SP document, in which the following statement is inscribed: ‘Achieve agreed learner numbers and funding targets’, remarks: ‘Obviously, we need to recruit as many people as we can.’ Consequently, she explained that, in the need to recruit such numbers - ‘recruiting people’ being synonymous with ‘enrolling learners’- often, such potential recruits did not attend their arranged interviews, jeopardising the achievement of expected minimum agreed learner numbers:

It was said that if people don’t turn up for their interviews, staff must ring them and find out where they are. And after I’d listened to the reasons behind that, from the senior managers, I thought: ‘Yes, they’re right.’ So I sent an email to the team saying ‘Are we ringing them? Can we do it?’ And about three members of staff came to me and said ‘I don’t think it’s our job to ring them; that should be Admissions.’ I thought: ‘Right, I’m not doing this the right way, so I called a Team Meeting and I explained about the numbers that we’ve got to get. And once I’d explained it, and had given them the reasons behind it all, they bought into it.
In recounting the above, Louise demonstrates how, firstly, she is persuaded by her senior managers that staff should contact interview non-attendees by telephone and, then, how she actually persuades them to do it. Having unsuccessfully used email communication, she calls a face-to-face Team Meeting, resulting in her staff being agreeable to such a practice, once they were informed about, to use Louise’s words: ‘the numbers that we’ve got to get’.

Thus, the practices of meeting her staff via the institutional practice of ‘the Team Meeting’, in conjunction with the practice of providing a rationale, can be conceived as complementary disciplinary techniques in realising those required behaviours of staff, and their subsequent adoption of unfamiliar working practices; a rationale premised, in this instance, upon those disciplining metrics within the discursive regime of East College’s SP document.

Louise finally explained:

I said ‘I’ll come down and I’ll help you ring them. I want to see for myself how many aren’t turning up, what impact it has.’ And I think from doing that, they’re now all on-board and they say: ‘Actually, we agree, we should be ringing them.’

In her explications Louise evinces Gleeson and Shain’s (1999) observations where they recognise that ‘middle managers have the tricky task of constructing the art of the possible in translating policy into practice in ways which are acceptable’ (p.471) [Original emphases]. According to Louise’s account she does manage to convince her staff to adopt a new working practice; a practice in which Louise participates herself. Moreover, Louise’s practices can be conceived in terms of ‘soft managerialism’ (Trow 1994), an instance of ‘soft management’ (Deem 1998), achieving consensus by actively collaborating with her staff; facilitating and establishing a shared vision; her staff-management practices demonstrating particular leadership practices which, according to Briggs (2006), involves middle-managers ‘setting the pace and direction of the team’ (p.93) and ‘shaping and sharing values’ (p.92).

Similarly, Monica, when explaining the need for her own staff-team to be involved in generating ‘business for the college’, commented further:

I don’t have issues with asking the staff, and I don’t have issues with Open Evenings, because when they need to be with the learner they’re left alone, on an understanding that if I need them to engage in the
bigger college picture I will ask them, it will be planned and they will share it; and it won’t be the same person each time. And it’s fair and it seems to work really well.

In the above articulation, Monica draws attention to those tensions that middle-managers face in their work when servicing the needs of their college as a whole while, simultaneously, responding to the differentiated needs of staff and students (Briggs 2005). Moreover, Monica’s explanation suggests that her ‘fair’ and ‘planned’ approach ensures that ‘it seems to work really well’, negotiating and constructing the art of the possible through an explicit recognition of roles and responsibilities and where she participates in external events with staff, like Louise, achieving consensus through collaboration and clear communication; establishing a shared vision.

While recognising Louise and Monica’s explanations of their working practices as ‘collaborative’ and ‘fair’, in Foucauldian terms, their behaviours can yet be conceived as particular tactics for the achievement of East College’s strategic objectives. Ball (2013) recognises these tactics as:

The basic molecules of power relations, what Foucault calls the “microphysics of power” [which] are individual choices, interactions and behaviours (tactics) (Ball 2013, p.31)

Moreover, in understanding Louise and Monica’s staff-management practices as particular middle-management tactics, Gleeson and Shain’s (1999) observation that FE middle-managers are ‘key intermediaries in potentially conflictual relations between professional and managerial interests’ (p.470) [Emphases added] remains apposite and that, still further, ‘in mediating messages between senior managers and lecturers they are in many ways more “managed” than those who they allegedly manage’ (p.470).

Such accountability to those whom they are managed by is exemplified when Nigel articulates some of the ways he interacted with, and managed, his own staff, having recently joined East College with the specific remit of improving a particular curriculum area:

It was brought to my attention that staff felt that they were being watched. I did it with the best intention in the world. I just wanted to make sure that everything was going as it should, in the classrooms. They knew I’d been brought in to turn the department around, but they
did feel under increased scrutiny. So I took that on-board. But at the same time I want to be able to walk into Robert’s office [Assistant Principal] and be asked the difficult question and know the answer to it. And that’s what I say to them: ‘When I get asked a question, I want to know the answer. So I am going to ask you, before I get asked. It’s nothing personal.’

Thus, for Nigel, the rationale provided to his staff in the practice of his watching of them was in terms of, at a future anticipated meeting, being asked ‘the difficult question’ by those who manage him. He didn’t articulate as to what the question might be, yet in ‘watching’ his staff in their classrooms, it is plausibly related to East College’s SP document where the fourth bulleted item under the rubric of ‘Quality of Provision’ states: ‘85% of lessons [to be] graded good or better with 10% outstanding, and no unsatisfactory lessons’. Moreover, Nigel also articulated during interview: ‘I’m focused on getting a Grade One’, having inherited a department which had been internally-graded, in the college’s most recent Self-Assessment Report, as performing at ‘Grade Four’; the latter grade being realised, in all likelihood, due to significant aspects related to classroom practices being deemed as deficient.

However, the fact that his staff made known their objections to his surveilling practices, resulting in the subsequent modification of Nigel’s staff-management practices, further highlights the ‘tricky task’ of translating policy into practice (Gleeson and Shain 1999). Moreover, in recognising Nigel’s surveillances as Foucauldian tactics; tactics which his staff considered intrusive, those institutional power struggles whereby teachers choose to resist those forms of discipline that seek to regulate their behaviours and established pedagogies (Gillies 2013, Smit 2003) are apparently manifested in the English FE college context.

The Disciplining Manager – Staff-management at Central College

Focusing on those interview data generated by the three lower middle-manager cases at Central College, in considering Harry’s particular staff-management practices, he speaks about the importance of ‘establishing relationships’ with his staff; relationships which he considers are comparable to those he forms with his students:
I work with tutors and I work with Programme Leaders who have a few staff that they work with. And I have relationships with them that are very similar to those I have with students. At break-times and lunch-times I’ll sit at the table in the Staffroom. So I won’t sit in the Managers’ Room and have lunch with the managers, I’ll sit with the people I work with, because I believe we should all work together.

Having established such relationships, facilitated to some degree through opportunities afforded by lunch and break-times where he can be sociable with his staff, as well as fellow Programme Leaders, Harry expresses his ‘belief’ that ‘we should all work together’ and, consequently, he can then ‘ask’ rather than ‘tell’ those staff with whom he works ‘to do things’:

For me, it’s always been a case of establishing relationships with people, and asking them to do things, rather than telling them.

Moreover, like Louise and Monica at East College, Harry recognises the importance of providing a rationale for those things he asks his staff to do:

And justifying why I’m asking them to do things, you know, ‘We need to do this because of this, and the implications will be this if it doesn’t happen.’

In his justification and rationale Harry expresses that he makes clear, what he terms ‘the implications’, if those ‘things’ that need to be done, don’t happen. He then brings to mind a specific example:

And I do try and keep it very basic, and the most basic example I can give is, I will say: ‘If you start with 15 kids in your class, all I want you to do is to look after them, make sure you don’t lose any, and make sure they’ve all achieved at the end of the year. And if you do all that, as a tutor, nobody can criticise you’; because that’s all that needs to happen.

Harry provides an explanation as though speaking to one of his tutors, stressing a number of young people, ‘kids’, at the beginning of their learning programme, in this case ‘15’, informing the tutor that they should ensure that none are ‘lost’ and that they all ‘achieve’. He further expresses: ‘I want you to look after them’ suggesting a specific way of working the tutor might adopt in the course of their interactions with those young people enrolled on the particular programme, and which plausibly assists to ensure their retention. In providing such an explication to his staff, Harry, to use his words: ‘keep[s] it very basic’. For instance, he does not articulate information about Success Rates, nor how these key data-metrics are calculated.
which, in the example he gives, would yield a 100% Success Rate\textsuperscript{54}, likely rendering his staff, according to Harry, as beyond reproach in their work as tutors; Central College’s SP document inscribing a requirement of a Success Rate of ‘80% or above’.

Moreover, in the way that Harry explains his staff-management practices and interactions with a tutor, in ‘keeping it basic’, his explanation is an almost identical repetition of how, at the interview’s beginning, he explained his role at Central College:

We have targets. And to meet those targets we need to ensure the learner stays on-programme and succeeds, completes the year and passes everything they’re given. It’s that basic.

In his almost identical replication of the explication immediately above, when formulating and relating his concerns to the vocational tutor, and which he reconfigures to suit the tutor’s specific working context, for example, using the referent ‘kids’ instead of ‘learner’, Harry reduces both his own working remit – aggregated targets, and the remit of his tutors – individual learning programmes, to their most basic form, stating at the conclusion of each of his almost identical explanations, respectively: ‘it’s that basic’ and, ‘that’s all that needs to happen’. In so doing he evinces those performative discourses recognised by Shain (2000) whereby managers ‘find themselves having to promote the managerial “bottom line”’ (p.222). Moreover, in promoting the ‘bottom line’, Harry illustrates how the working practices of both Programme Leaders and Vocational Tutors are tied to those specific knowledges within Central College’s SP document in the form of disciplining metrics; disciplining metrics which Harry conveys to his staff through his tactics of ‘establishing relationships’ and ‘keeping it basic’.

Likewise, Dave, in recounting his own staff-management practices and interactions, further illustrates the importance of communicating with his staff in ways which they understand more readily, explaining that he has to translate the information received from Central College’s senior management team:

I act like a sponge, really. We soak up a lot of information that comes down from the senior management team and if you were to give that same information out to the staff you would probably get barraged. So it

\textsuperscript{54} Number at Start of Programme 15, Number at End of Programme 15, realises 100% Retention. All 15 Achieving realises 100% Achievement; Retention x Achievement / 100 = Success Rate of 100%
needs re-wording, it needs re-sculpting, into a way that people are going to understand.

Dave suggests that this practice of translation is a practice shared by fellow Programme Managers, such as Harry, speaking in terms of ‘we’ and the requirement for Programme Managers to, firstly, absorb senior management information and then to re-word it; increasing the possibility that it will be accepted by staff. In adopting this particular practice which can again be conceived as a Foucauldian tactic, like the middle-managers, Louise and Monica at East College, Dave evinces his own practice of mediating senior management messages, ‘buffering potential conflict and resistance from staff’ (Gleeson and Shain 1999, p.471); ‘making it happen’ (Briggs 2005, p.32) while, simultaneously nullifying the likelihood of being, to use Dave’s militaristic term, ‘barraged’.

Moreover, Dave speaks in terms of the practice of protecting his staff from realising his own affective state which can plausibly be understood as a necessary component of his absorbing and translating practices, ensuring his physical appearance provides little hint of turmoil in either the receipt, or during the translation, of senior management messages, remarking:

I think it’s important always to have a smile on your face, even though, deep, deep down-inside, you feel like you’re about to explode.

Additionally, Dave speaks about the practice of making time for his staff, conceiving such making of time as critical to the leading of his team; whereby the practice of leading others he recognises as a fundamental requirement in his own realisation as a manager. Dave continues:

I must admit I do give a lot of time to individuals. I was always taught, when I was in my last job, the Managing Director that guided me, he always said, ‘You’ll never become a manager unless you can lead a team. Unless you can lead individuals, you’ll never become a manager.’ So, I’m quite good in that respect.

In the above interview data Dave articulates that being a manager requires the enactment of leadership practices, articulating his explanation like a mantra, transposing the almost identical propositions in its repetition, stressing that being a manager requires the practiced skills of leading a team, as well as individuals. Dave considers himself to be competent in such leadership practices, largely through being attentive to his staff in the practice of making time for them.
While Dave spoke in terms of ‘protecting’ his team, Matthew in the following interview-data speaks about the recognition of his role as a ‘facilitator’.

Consequently, both of these lower middle-managers at Central College can be understood in terms of ‘the responsive manager’ (Alexiadou 2001) who recognises their ‘protective’ and ‘facilitating’ role in her own study; a role that ensures that teaching staff have a clear working framework that shields them from pressures in order to remain focused on their pedagogic-work. Matthew remarks:

I think a lot my role is facilitating so that the teaching staff can do their job. That’s my feeling. They've got a job to do, which is teaching.

However, in foregrounding their work as teachers, Matthew also speaks about their work as tutors; a role that some of his staff find problematic:

They all have a tutor group; they have a tutorial role and a teaching role, and some are much better teachers than they are tutors. I mean, some just don’t get it! [Laughs] They’re just not interested. So trying to lead those and get them engaged in that role. It’s critical that staff engage in the tutorial process, to see its importance. It’s about trying to get them to take ownership which is a recurring theme. It’s always something you’re working on.

Consequently, in his work as a middle-manager, Matthew talks about leading those reluctant tutors in order that they become engaged and are able to recognise the importance of ‘the tutorial process’. Such a practice of leading and getting his staff engaged he articulates as a ‘recurring theme’ and where his practice as a disciplining manager is continuous. However, Matthew doesn’t provide the reasons for the perceived criticality of the tutorial process to the work of his curriculum-area’s teachers, yet it can be plausibly traced to Central College’s SP document which states: ‘To maintain an excellent success rate of 80% or above with high levels of both retention and achievement’ [Emphases added] and where, in recent years, the FE sector as a whole, has recognised colleges’ tutorial provisions as a means of improving student retention and achievement (FETN 2014, Martinez 2001).

Notably, Lucas (2004) observes the ‘greater tutoring and guidance role’ (p.146) of teachers within the FE sector, which he traces to initiatives such as YTS (Youth Training Schemes) in the early nineteen-eighties, becoming ‘particularly relevant for the FE college teacher within the context of improving retention and progression’ (pp.146-147) [Emphases added]. Moreover, despite the current climate of funding
cuts within FE (Welham 2014), tutorial provision continues to be funded by the Education Funding Agency, provided it is adequately planned and organised, and ‘explicit in the student’s learning plan or timetable’ (EFA 2013, p.19). Thus, for Matthew, while remaining in a lower middle-management position, his attempts to discipline those teachers, who he recognises as reluctant tutors, are likely to be ongoing.

**Brief Summary**

Having drawn upon the nine middle-managers’ management of, and interactions with, their staffs it is clear, from the above, that while there is a unifying concern around data across all three levels, there are noticeable differences in the emphases and modes of social interaction with their staffs; particularly between the senior middle-managers at West College and those lower middle-managers at Central College; the latter, for instance, appearing to give more significance to the leadership and management of staff through their specific social and, sociable, practices.

There is now a discussion, followed by a summary, which considers some of the implications of the above genealogical meta-analyses when formulating the identity of the curriculum-based English FE college middle-manager.

**Discussion**

From the generated interview-data and through the course of the above meta-analyses, where I have specifically focused on the practices of those nine middle-manager cases in this study, I propose that middle-management practices cohere around data-metrics whereby they can be understood to be preoccupied by them. This is made clear in the ways that each of them, at senior, middle and lower levels, spoke about the ways in which data informed their understanding of their role, as well as through their explanations of how they went about some of their daily work; drawing on events and interactions that they were able to readily recollect during interview.

Through the sheer consistency in their preoccupation with data-metrics, manifested in their explications, either directly or indirectly, it is clear that data-metrics form
the ontological basis around which they conceive of, and carry out their work; providing the principal component of their middle-management ‘realities’. Moreover, epistemologically, the ways in which they construct their specific middle-management knowledges are significantly influenced by specific data-metrics; metrics that are materially inscribed in each of their respective SP documents, providing ‘discursive truths’ that steer them (Gillies 2013); influencing their middle-management behaviours through the regular or, according to one of the senior middle-managers, ‘constant’ monitoring of their data.

Such steering practices are exemplified when a middle-manager at East College remarked about her need to know ‘up-front’, about five Learner Withdrawals which potentially jeopardised the achievement of expected Success Rate metrics, articulating during interview as if speaking to a staff member: ‘let’s do something to put it right’; such ‘putting it right’ being the taking of corrective action that reduces the potentiality of such Learner Withdrawal numbers. Consequently, the particular middle-manager can be understood as practising ‘disciplined self-management’ (Ozga 2009) who, in a specific ‘regime of governance, self-corrects in relation to the steer being given’ (Gillies 2013, p.62); the particular steer, in this instance, being those disciplining metrics of her SP document. Indeed, from the meta-analyses above it is clear that all nine of the middle-manager cases, in the course of their work, exercise disciplined self-management.

Moreover, in their disciplining management of others and in the shaping of others’ conduct (Fimyar 2008), while they spoke about the importance of some of their own interpersonal skills such as the practice of ‘establishing relationships’, as in the case of Harry, they nevertheless foregrounded those mechanisms recognised as pervasive within the school-setting (Lingard et al. 2003) to shape the conduct of their staffs, through their specific preoccupations with data-metrics that are:

...[u]sed as a means to affect others’ actions in the pursuit of desired goals. Audits, inspections, target-setting and performance indicators and measures are deployed as a means to influence behaviours (Bush and Bell 2002:226). (Gillies 2013, p.77)

However, while Gillies (2013) writes about the ontology of leadership and interpersonal skills as though distinct from those ‘other mechanisms – principally numbers’ (p.77) [Emphases added], I propose that the exercising of interpersonal
skills in order to establish relationships can be recognised, specifically, as a disciplinary technique in the ‘construction of the governable person’ (Miller and O’Leary 1987) and which, consequently, renders individuals amenable to particular ‘regimes of numbers’ (Ozga 2008). Thus, the establishment of relationships can be conceived as a Foucauldian tactic whose telos is the achievement of those materially-inscribed disciplining metrics of the middle-manager’s college SP document; a tactic among the many ‘small acts of cunning [that are] apparently innocent, but profoundly suspicious’ (Foucault 1975, p.139) in the ‘microphysics of power’.

Summary
Throughout this chapter I have presented data and analysis regarding how middle-management practices that each of the college middle-managers recounted can be traced to their respective college SP documents; demonstrating, in Tamboukou’s (1999) terms, how such practices are tied to, and influenced by, particular external conditions. I have also shown, as evinced by the data, how identical middle-management practices are apparently realised within separate colleges, and at different middle-management levels; although it should be borne in mind that the ‘thickness’ (Coffield 2012) of the colleges’ middle-management hierarchical structures were not the same; for instance, at West College there were senior middle-managers, whereas at East College the most senior middle-management positions were more like those middle middle-managers at West College. However, this serves to corroborate those published literatures that recognise that English FE middle-management identity is not homogenous (Gleeson and Knights 2008; Gleeson and Shain 1999) while, simultaneously, acknowledging the ‘idiosyncrasies’ of English FE colleges (Page 2011a).

Moreover, while recognising the heterogeneity of both the middle-management position and the differing college contexts within which ‘the middle-manager’ carries out their work, while my genealogical meta-analysis suggests a preoccupation with data, whereby their practices can be understood as shared; coalescing around what I have termed ‘disciplining metrics’, the interview-data further suggests that there is a greater intensity in the focus upon data the more senior the middle-manager within the college hierarchy. Furthermore, I propose that such a greater intensity of focus
upon data is accompanied by a concomitant diminution in middle-management focus upon institutional social relationships, with those lower down the middle-management hierarchy, as well as with, critically, teachers and students, such that these relationships can be understood to be ‘de-socialised’ (Ball 2003, De Rada 2007).

Indeed, I argued in Chapter Five that the use of the referent ‘learner’ (as opposed to ‘student’) is a discursive object that can be conceived, specifically, in terms of its ‘calculability’; an ontological entity that emerged under the previous New Labour government. Consequently, the learner as a referent can be considered to be ‘de-socialised’ in its very ontology and whereby ‘the learner’, as a person, becomes a simulacrum ... in the “now you see it now you don’t” game of appearance and reality, in which it [becomes] ever more difficult to tell which [is] which’ (Stronach and MacLure 1997, p.70) [Emphasis added].

Such ‘de-socialised’ relationships are realised in part through what Apple (2004) recognises as ‘the use of a “neutral” commodity language’ (p.126) which obscures ‘what are profound interrelations between persons’ (p.126) [Emphases added], observing:

...[e]ducators have developed categories and modes of perception which reify or thingify individuals so that they (the educators) can confront students as institutional abstractions rather than as a concrete persons with whom they have real ties in the process of cultural and economic reproduction. (p.126)

Similarly, Ball (2003) notes that: ‘the activities of the new technical intelligentsia, of management, drive performativity into the day-to-day practices of teachers and into [their] social relations’ (p.223) [Emphases added].

Such ‘performativity’ I recognise as having ‘been driven’ into the day-to-day practices and social relations of those senior middle-managers at West College, epitomised by Gordon when articulating a recollected social interaction with a staff member, when he enquires as to the number of apprentices that his centre has retained:

Right, Barry, where are we up to with these Apprentices? How many have we actually got on-board?’
Gordon’s salutation and recollected opening of his communication with Barry suggesting the functional nature of his interaction; foregrounding Barry’s utility in the quest for those disciplining metrics through which Gordon’s management practices are steered. This recollected dialogue suggests that such a relationship, and others like them (for example, when Barbara speaks in terms of her ‘direct management’ of teaching staff), are different to those articulated by Harry, a lower middle-manager at Central College, who speaks about the establishment of social relationships that can be conceived as more collegial and which are realised, for instance, during lunchtimes, when Harry sits at the staffroom table with his tutors. Furthermore, the extent to which social relations are both performative and desocialised between Gordon and those senior managers of West College’s Executive team is also worthy of consideration, particularly when Gordon articulates that he has to ‘go armed’ to his regular Performance Monitoring Meetings; where he is cross-examined by senior managers about his data, recollecting their dialogue in the following way: ‘That’s down and that’s down.’ Consequently, such an increasing intensity around data appears to continue as the threshold between middle and senior management is traversed, and which is further indicated by Matthew, at Central College, when talking about a student’s ‘sideways move’ which he considers his own senior management would recognise as adversely ‘affecting the data’.

Consequently in returning to the question posed by Tamboukou (1999), who urges professionals in FE to consider: ‘what is this “now” within which all of us find ourselves?’ (p.202); it is evident that the identity of the curriculum-based English FE college middle-manager, can be usefully realised through their working practices; working practices which yield an identity where they are understood to be preoccupied with data-metrics. However, the extent of their preoccupation, to the detriment of other practices such as the establishment of meaningful social relations, particularly with teachers and students, appears to intensify the more senior their position within the ‘thick layer’ of FE middle-management hierarchies.
Chapter Nine

Conclusion

Introduction

The study has identified the centrality of data metrics in the practices of the English FE college curriculum-based middle-manager and this has implications for policy and practice when considering their work. In this final chapter I begin by reviewing the need for the study and its justification. The three research questions are then addressed followed by an evaluation of the study’s contribution to those existing literatures about the FE middle-manager, and their middle-management work. The implications for both policy and practice are then discussed while, finally, the implications for future research agenda are considered.

Reviewing and justifying the need for this study

This research study set out to gain an understanding of the English FE college middle-manager whose work is, primarily, curriculum-based. The study is considered necessary given that FE as an education sector is under-researched (Lumby 1988, McNay 1997, Page 2011) and only a relatively limited number of publications exist related specifically to FE middle-management. Indeed, given that Briggs (2005) in her own study asserts that the middle-manager’s role is one around which ‘the work of the [FE] college articulates’ (p.48) it is perhaps surprising that there are not more publications when considering their criticality to the successful running of General FE colleges (Alexiadiou 2000, Gleeson and Shain 1999, Page 2011); lending a clear justification for my own study. A further justification for this study is the deployment of Foucauldian tools of analysis to the field of Further Education, in the form of archaeology and genealogy. I considered Foucault’s work appropriate to my study as it is concerned with:

...“the unconscious structures of thought” and the organizing discourses which operate at an archaeological (rules and regularities) rather than an epistemological (claims to truth) level of knowledge. (Ball 2013, p.5)

[Emphases added]

Archaeological analyses facilitated the interpretation and understanding of the strategic plan documents of each of the three colleges in terms of their ‘rules and
regularities’, as specific discursive configurations; rendering historically-contingent and institutionally-specific ‘truths’ that served to shape and influence the actions and practices of individuals.

Moreover, through the use of Foucauldian genealogy, with its specific focus upon practices, the ‘sinews of power … embedded in mundane practices and in social relationships and [their] haphazard and contingent nature’ (Ball 2013, p.6) are made known; allowing specific practices to be understood through particular knowledge-power arrangements; knowledge-power arrangements which are materially inscribed within college strategic plan documents.

Notwithstanding the notion that Foucault was highly sceptical of unifying theories, a significant strength in adopting a ‘Foucauldian analytical perspective’ for empirical research is outlined by Trowler (2012), when he states:

> It is better to deploy explicit, challengeable, theory to edge out the sort of tacit theory that inevitably exists anyway and which is invisibly embodied and encoded in our understanding and use of data if not surfaced … Explicit theory, then, surfaces sets of propositions and so renders them amenable to critique. (Trowler 2012, p. 275-276)

[Emphases added]

In my explicit use of Foucauldian analytics: in both archaeological and genealogical analyses, I have attempted to make clear the particular approach adopted and used, rendering any conclusions reached, consequently, open to critique by others.

As to whether Foucauldian analytical tools might be considered an appropriate means by which to conceptualize the empirical data, I demonstrated their efficacy in my earlier research work, where I piloted the Foucauldian methods of archaeology and genealogy (please refer to Fort 2011). Indeed, Blacker observes that Foucault is ‘tailor-made’ for those engaged in research within contemporary educational institutions (Blacker 1998, cited in Ball 2013, p.142) where the context of my research is the English further education college. Hence, the use of Foucault is corroborated by published researchers in the fields of education and organization studies.

Acknowledging that there are always limitations in adopting a particular perspective in attempts to understand the complexities of the social world, this study is similar
to those others that deploy analytical frameworks associated with recognised key thinkers, for example, *Arendtian, Bourdieusian* and so forth. Hence, this study can be critiqued from such particular perspectives (and others), just as Foucault can be adopted and used, likewise, to critique them. However, Foucault was not so much concerned with knowledge for triumphant purposes (as a means of vanquish over others; intellectually or otherwise) but to ‘disorient’, ‘to attempt to know how and to what extent it is possible to think differently’ (Foucault 1984, cited in Martin 1995, p.57). Consequently, while adopting Foucault can be considered limiting (as in the selection of other ‘theorists’, philosophies and perspectives), by choosing a specific focus, it accordingly provides a strength.

Crucially, in the opening sentence of this thesis, I recognise the middle-manager, specifically, as a middle-manager *subject*; ‘the subject’ being absolutely fundamental to the ‘use of’ Foucault. As Ball (2013) observes, Foucault was ‘profoundly and consistently interested in how “human beings are made subjects”’ (p.5). Moreover, when writing about ‘the historical ontology of ourselves’ (Foucault 1984, p.49), he formulates two fundamental questions:

> How are we constituted as subjects of our own knowledge? How are we constituted as subjects who exercise or submit to power relations?

(p.49)

The ‘subject’ within the two questions posed by Foucault, when considering my own study, is the curriculum-based FE middle-manager.

**Addressing the Research study’s questions**

The study, which generated interview data via nine middle-manager cases within three separate colleges, as well as drawing upon each of the middle-managers’ respective strategic plan documents, set out to address the following three questions:

1. How do Further Education middle-managers recognise and understand their particular subject-position?

2. What are the consequences of institutional policies on the working practices of the FE middle-manager subject (as well as how institutional policies exist in tension with government policies)?
(3) What do middle-managers recognise as the prominent discourses that influence their own subject-position, as well as those of others?

In addressing the first question, it is clear that the middle-managers recognise and understand their position as subject to the achievement of targets; targets which are contained within their respective college strategic plans. Consequently, in Foucauldian terms, they present themselves as a disciplined subject; they are disciplined by those metrics inscribed within their college’s strategic plan document.

Their working practices constitute a preoccupation with the monitoring and scrutiny of those data-metrics which enable them to ascertain whether those targets they are tasked with achieving are likely to be met; recognising that they must pay attention to specific metrics which possess particular significance; primarily, achievement, retention and success rates linked to learning programmes and which yield financial revenues55 for their colleges. This is clear from the analysis of all nine middle-manager cases at different hierarchical levels: senior-middle, middle-middle and lower-middle. Furthermore, in the recounting of their discussions with teaching staffs, there is evidence that they convey the importance of such metrics to them, indirectly or otherwise.

Moreover, the preoccupation with particular data-metrics evidenced by each of the nine middle-managers is corroborated by a recent Ofsted (2014) report, where HMI inspectors visited 20 ‘Outstanding’-rated providers within the further education sector. One of the key criticisms highlighted was their recognition that the FE sector is ‘data-driven and overly focused on qualification aim success’ (p.5). Furthermore, they noted ‘a culture that is driven by policies, strategies and documentation’ (p.4), indicating the significance of those key institutional documents in the form of strategic plans within my own study, replete with inscribed data-metrics in the form

55 The funding formula for learning programmes is often modified annually, however for 2014/15 it is currently calculated as follows: (Student numbers x National funding rate per student x Retention factor x Programme Cost Weighting + Disadvantage funding) x Area Cost Uplift = Total Programme Funding (Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/327846/Funding_rates_and_formula_201415_v0_1_6.pdf, Access date: December 9, 2014) Note that ‘Success’ has been removed from the current formula following policy changes due to government concerns over ‘perverse incentives’ (See also: http://feweek.co.uk/2012/07/05/a-new-era-of-16-19-funding-per-learner/, Access date: December 11, 2014)
of ‘key performance indicators’, ‘strategic priorities’ and ‘key milestones’ at West College, Central College and East College, respectively.

Turning next to the question of the consideration of the consequences of institutional policies on the working practices of the FE middle-manager subject, as well as how institutional policies exist in tension with government policies, it is evident from the particular policy document my study focuses upon – the strategic plan – that this document steers them in their work; it is a territorializing instrument (Mennicken and Miller 2012) that provides parameters that not only delimit the scope of middle-management work, but yields particular middle-manager identities that privilege numbers. In Ball’s (2014) terms, the nine middle-managers can be considered to be ‘numbered subjects and subject to numbers’ (unpaged).

When considering their middle-management practices in light of government policy middle-managers’ preoccupations with data-metrics appear to confirm some of those criticisms made in the Review of Vocational Education (DfE 2011), which notes: ‘Performance tables, funding systems and regulatory compliance are all pushing in the wrong direction’ (p.5), further observing: ‘the perverse incentives [that are] created by current funding and accountability mechanisms’ (p.45). Consequently, while middle-managers remain preoccupied with data and are accountable for specific data-outcomes and where, as evidenced by this study, their quotidian management practices of meeting with their staffs are often premised on the basis that particular sets of data-metrics appear precarious, scope for other forms of middle-management work, for instance, around pedagogy, are impoverished.

While my own study focuses exclusively upon curriculum-based middle-managers, the data generated prompts questions regarding their actual concerns about curricula; curriculum issues were largely absent from the interview data. In this sense, the middle-managers might be considered curriculum-based but not necessarily curriculum-focused. This appears to confirm those observations expressed by Gunter (2001) who notes that middle-management within schools is ‘a means through which accountability is achieved. In this way middle-management is
a creation of external policy and how senior managers require systems and 
structures that will secure implementation’ (p.108) [Emphases added].

To summarise, in addressing the second research question, the middle-manager can 
be understood as a ‘cipher for policy’ (Ball 2008, p.43); a living, breathing 
embodiment of those specific discursive truths contained within their strategic plan 
documents. However, while they may be a cipher for institutional policy it appears, 
following recent criticisms of particular practices within the FE sector, by Ofsted 
(2014), that those specific middle-manager practices found in my own study, as a 
consequence of their preoccupations with data, are incongruent with current 
national policy and might be remedied, according to HMI inspectors’ 
recommendations, through college senior-management teams:

Establishing a mission and a set of values and objectives that clearly and 
in simple terms place a priority on giving learners the very best learning 
experience and ensure a corporate approach to developing and 
delivering high quality provision for them (Ofsted 2014, p.5) [Emphases 
added]

Thus, it is apparent, certainly when considering current Ofsted agenda that there is a 
policy lag between current national policy and those institutional policy priorities 
existing at the three colleges during the time-period of my own study (my data 
collection occurred in 2012 and 2013). For example, in making the above 
recommendation, Ofsted (2014) seek to rectify specifically what they recognise as a 
sector that is: ‘driven by policies, strategies and documentation and not by practice 
in the classroom or training workshop’ (p.4). [Emphases added]

Consequently, in the particular consideration of the way institutional policies exist in 
tension with government policies, when accounting for recent Ofsted 
announcements, such announcements are more than rhetorical as they seek to shift 
localised policies, whereby individual colleges privilege the achievement of targets 
(as inscribed in local strategic plan documents), to objectives that focus on 
pedagogy, training and ‘the learning experience’.
However, in seeking to shift attention to classroom practices, in the quest for institutional survival through the maximising of available revenues in a localised competitive context, this also raises questions as to how national funding formulae will be accounted for by individual colleges. For instance, in order to remain viable, as has historically been the case within the FE sector, attention will inevitably be paid, by colleges, to the ways in which revenues are made available; influencing the strategies and tactics individual institutions and college managers/leaders deploy in their accessing of them. Consequently, it will be interesting to see how demands for the prioritising of the learner experience, by Ofsted, play out, as colleges necessarily attend to funding mechanisms and their exploitation of them; suggesting a requirement for future research endeavours.

Furthermore, even if, and when, institutions begin to align their strategic objectives more closely to current Ofsted agenda, this would not necessarily eliminate middle-management practices that privilege data-metrics. For instance, how would ‘a priority on giving learners the very best learning experience’ be known, or measured? Consequently, this raises questions about the ways in which education institutions are made accountable, and the forms of knowledge deemed legitimate in the constitution of such accountability.

Turning to consider the third question of my research study: ‘What do middle-managers recognise as the prominent discourses that influence their own subject position, as well as those of others?’ it is evident that they recognise the discursive regime (Tamboukou 1999) of their institution’s strategic plan within which they are enmeshed, providing a specific regime of truth (O’Farrell 2005) that influences their work. Moreover, I propose this has largely been established when addressing the two preceding research questions. However, while each of the colleges’ strategic plans inscribed some significant differences, the data generated demonstrates that some identical middle-management practices were evident; identical practices at different colleges. For instance, where college middle-managers established their practice of overseeing learner withdrawals; learner withdrawals which, if processed unchecked, would adversely affect those data-metric targets inscribed.
To provide a specific illustration of this replicated practice, one middle-manager spoke in terms of meeting their team to rectify a potentially adverse ‘data situation’, articulating: ‘Let’s do something to put it right.’ However, while they didn’t articulate what they and their team actually did to put it right (nor did the middle-manager at the different college), it is implied that through the possibilities available to ‘remedy the situation’, that the learners, in the instances cited, were not actually ‘withdrawn’. Such remedies could be enacted in a number of ways: by persuading the learner to return to college and catch-up their missed work and assignments, or allowing the learner to produce sufficient assessment evidence after specific assignment deadlines had expired and, importantly, amending class registers to change previously recorded learner absences, for audit purposes. These possible remediating practices, and others like them, may well have been executed, however, the important point in terms of addressing the third research question is that there is strong evidence that middle-managers recognise the specific ‘managerial bottom-line’ to which they are expected to adhere, and to which they require others (i.e. their staffs) to accede. As Shain (2000) in her study of 23 college managers observes:

> Within managerialist discourses such as performativity, where managers work towards the achievement of externally defined targets ... managers can find themselves having to promote the managerial ‘bottom line’. (p.222) [Emphases added]

Thus, while strategic plans make announcements such as ‘Set high expectations to promote the consistent achievement of aspirational learning goals’ (West College) and ‘Inspiring learners to succeed in life and work’ (East College), these are particular ‘fabrications’ (Ball 2003) for specific ends; constructions that are artful:

> They are not ‘outside the truth’ ... they are produced purposefully in order ‘to be accountable’. Truthfulness is not the point - the point is their effectiveness, both in the market or for Inspection or appraisal, and in the ‘work’ they do ‘on’ and ‘in’ the organisation – their transformational and disciplinary impact. (Ball 2003, p.224)

Notwithstanding the ‘disciplinary impact’ of strategic plan documents, and to which my own study attests, it is evident that there are certain discursive truths (Gillies 2013) inscribed within them which are of less significance for middle-management work, while those that are significant, crucially, are specific truths which show that,
independently of one another, and at different institutions, middle-managers engage in identical practices.

An explanation for such homogeneity of practice is through middle-managers’ understanding related to national funding formulae for FE colleges and the particular significance of programme success rates. In recent historical terms within the FE sector, such success rates have been formulated as: ‘Success rate = Achievement rate multiplied by Retention rate’

Thus, for middle-managers, it is enough for them to know the specific target figures they are expected to attain (as contained within their respective college strategic plans e.g. West College 86%, East College 82% or higher and Central College 80%+) – to recognise the ‘bottom-line’ to which they must adhere and to monitor the potential data-outcomes through the use of the success rate formula; calculating the effects upon success rates, for instance, when retention rates are affected by the potential losses (i.e. withdrawals) of learners.

Consequently, in recognising those discourses that influence their subject-position, certainly as evinced by this study, the success-rate formula is instrumental in shaping their middle-management practices. It is a disciplining mechanism, through which middle-managers are made accountable, and which renders their teaching staffs accountable; it is a means by which power-relations are exercised; it is a knowledge-power configuration. Moreover, in attending to the success-rate formula, those ‘sinews of power … embedded in mundane practices and in social relationships’ (Ball 2013) to which I drew attention at the start of this chapter are evinced.

The study and its contribution to existing FE Middle-management literatures
This study contributes to the literatures about FE middle-management by showing how their work continues to revolve around their role as ‘implementer’; a role Briggs (2005) recognises as the middle-managers’ ‘most visible feature’ (p.33) and which involves the implementation of college policy: ‘making it happen’ (p.32). And where Page (2011a) notes, in his study of First-Tier Managers (the equivalent of the lower-

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56 Please refer to: [http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/3609/1/ypla-field_guide_to_sixth_form_success_rates-gn-may11-v1.pdf](http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/3609/1/ypla-field_guide_to_sixth_form_success_rates-gn-may11-v1.pdf) for a fuller explanation of Success Rates and associated metrics Access date: December 9, 2014
middle-manager position in my own study), that they are the ‘final implementer’ (p.102).

Contrasting the study’s findings with Gleeson and Shain (1999), who understand middle-management work as ‘complex and contradictory’ (p.461), recognising middle-manager identity as characterised by ‘ambiguity’, my own study foregrounds, instead, the uniformity and homogeneity of their work. Such uniformity and homogeneity is noteworthy given that the middle-managers in my own study occupy a hierarchical middle-management span from senior to lower. However, while Gleeson and Shain’s (1999) study focused on managerial cultures, whereas my own focused on management practices, both studies can be considered as located in critical and socially critical projects and literatures; seeking to understand the realities of middle-management work within college contexts when compared with middle-management as an idea, as well as the ways subject-positions (e.g. managers, teachers and students) are able to express agency or otherwise, and the ways in which ‘people get on and work together with “institutionalized practices” regarding roles and structures’ (Gunter et al. 2013, p.567).

Ontologically, ‘the middle-manager’ as an occupation within the FE sector was inchoate at the time of Gleeson and Shain’s (1999) study, ‘a role created “overnight” to manage the functions of the [newly] autonomous colleges‘ (Briggs 2007, p.475); a direct consequence of the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act, which removed colleges from local authority control, heralding a reformed, and reforming, market-oriented FE sector. Such reforms introduced new managerialism to the sector, resulting in redefinitions of professionalism and where those ‘caught in the middle’ (between senior management and lecturers) were at the fore in the mediation of such change; change that was often contested. Consequently, there is limited worth in making direct comparisons. However, notwithstanding each study’s shared critical and socially critical positioning, there remains some merit in placing my study in relation to theirs as, in the intervening period, despite the need for more knowledge and understanding about middle-management work, the ‘FE college middle-manager’ has become a more familiar occupation and, while it can still be considered ‘complex and contradictory’, the latter adjective being particular
apposite for those lower middle-managers who engage in both management and pedagogic labour, this study suggests that it is characterised less by ‘ambiguity’ than previously.

In summary, relating this study to the existing body of literatures about middle-manager identity and middle-management work, while it corroborates their crucial role as implementers, re-affirming the work of Briggs (2005, 2006) who recognises this specific role-aspect of middle-managers’ work as their most visible feature; confirming the usefulness of her typology when considering the work of the FE middle-manager, this research contributes to knowledge about specific middle-management practices in the securing of such implementation. For instance, Gleeson and Knights (2008) noting the ‘Intense internal and external pressures that hide an “extra hours” culture in which middle managers plug gaps in provision’ (p.62) and who ‘engage in underground working practices to get things done, over and above their contractual duties’ (p.62); research findings, again, confirmed by my own study which reported typical working weeks of between 50 and 60 hours, this study makes specific contributions to knowledge about middle-managers’ work by showing the specific practices which make up their working days; practices which are centred upon data-metrics; disciplining them in their work and shaping their management behaviours: their monitoring and scrutiny of data, their calculating practices, their practices of accounting for their data and which, importantly, elucidate the de-socialising effects between institutional actors as a consequence of their preoccupation with data-metrics; a preoccupation which appears to be shared by their senior managers. Crucially, this study clearly shows how these practices are replicated at separate colleges, by middle-managers at different hierarchical levels, independently of one another. In Foucauldian terms, such conformity at separate institutions evince a particular mode of middle-management practices which:

...[r]epeat, or imitate one another, support one another ... converge, and gradually produce the blueprint of a general method. (Foucault 1975, p.138)

Consequently, while middle-managers are discursively-captured by their individual college targets, in the attainment of these targets they conduct their practices in accordance with those disciplinary mechanisms at a national level, as expressed, for
instance, by the success rate formula. This conclusion corroborates the work of those writers who note the criticality of funding mechanisms to the work of FE managers and college leaders (Alexiadiou 2001, Gleeson 2001, Gleeson and Knights 2008, Gleeson and Shain 1999), however, the contribution of my particular study shows how such criticality is manifested in middle-managers’ quotidian practices.

Moreover, in the consideration of the use of Page’s (2011a) faith-based typology, the three lower middle-managers in this study (the middle-management layer equivalent to Page’s (2011a) First-Tier Managers) might be considered ‘priests’; given their concerns for working with their staffs, working together as a team, while also protecting them from the harsher messages that emanate from their college’s senior managers. However, they further indicate that they are ‘organisation-focused’, so can plausibly be also considered as ‘converts’. Indeed, the difficulties of identifying with any one faith-position, exclusively, highlights the strength of Page’s (2011a) typology; demonstrating the different perspectives middle-managers adopt in the course of their work, requiring them to shift ‘their faith’ depending on their social and institutional context; whether interacting with senior managers, colleagues or students.

Finally, through Foucauldian archaeological and genealogical analysis, further knowledge and understanding, about the FE middle-manager is realised; making contributions to Foucauldian literatures as well demonstrating the usefulness of Foucault’s work to the field of Further Education and, specifically, the FE middle-manager subject.

**The implications of this research study for practice and policy**

In assessing the implications of this study, and the knowledge produced by it, consideration is now given to policy and practice. Policy and practice are considered together given that the findings of this study show that, ontologically, the middle-manager is a necessary agent in the securing and implementation of college policy, an observation corroborated by others (e.g. Briggs 2005, Gunter 2001), as a consequence of their middle-management practices.
I have argued that while the nine middle-manager cases were curriculum-based, they were not, as evinced by the study’s interview data, curriculum-focused. When they did speak about aspects most closely-related to curricula, their concerns were largely based around discourses of performativity, in terms of Ofsted, and requirements for their colleges to become ‘Outstanding’, to maintain their ‘Outstanding’ status, or to ‘improve’ still further; one middle-manager talking in terms of ‘Outstanding plus’ (a non-existent Ofsted category). Consequently, when articulating those aspects of their work most closely-related to curricula, their concerns were attuned to, and reflective of, externally-defined policy; policy which they largely recognised and understood through the discourse of Ofsted grading criteria; exhibited within components of each of their college’s strategic plan documents.

In considering middle-management identity, specifically, as curriculum-focused, it prompts questions as to how, and whether, their identities ought to be subject to the securing and implementation of policy, in the same ways as those middle-managers whose identities are not pedagogically connected (such as service-based middle-managers, included in Briggs’ (2005) study), given that the accessing and acquisition of specific curriculum, by learners, is realised through practices centred upon pedagogy and learn-ing; certainly if college leaders attend to Black and Wiliam (1998), who argue that it is the quality of the interaction ‘between those taught and the teacher … which is at the heart of pedagogy’ (p.16) and where ‘those taught’, in the context of this study, is the ontological subject, ‘the learner’; a discursive entity who the nine middle-managers repeatedly foregrounded in their articulations yet, in Ball’s (2003) terms, can be recognised as a ‘fabrication’: a cipher for data.

Moreover, it prompts questions, not for curriculum-management but for curriculum-leadership, and the possibilities for this particular middle-management function, within FE colleges, to be constructed specifically in terms of leadership; affording opportunities for college middle-leaders to be more autonomous and, consequently, more pedagogically-focused in their work. There is some evidence of this within the data whereby one senior middle-manager (at West College) articulated and understood her identity as ‘a head-teacher’; however, she was afforded such autonomy through the explicit support of her college’s principal;
promoting a separate identity for her area within the college, by branding and marketing it as an ‘A-level Centre’. Nevertheless, it was also the case that she, too, was subject to the same disciplining metrics as other middle-managers; monitoring the scope of her middle-management responsibility by, for example, ‘looking at the data.’

In the specific consideration of middle-managers as leaders, Briggs (2007) observes that in England’s schools and FE colleges, the range of middle-leadership identities ‘is bewildering’ (p.483) and while I propose that it may be desirable for work ‘in the middle’ to be increasingly pedagogically-focused, a proposal supported by very recent Ofsted (2014) concerns, she notes the complex and changing context of schools and colleges as a consequence ‘of overwhelming waves of government reform’ (p.483-484) and, somewhat alarmingly, that those ‘undertaking leadership roles may need clarification as to what a teacher is’ (p.474) [Emphases added]. Consequently, in light of Briggs’ (2007) observations, attempting to realise a sharper pedagogic focus by foregrounding middle-management identity specifically as middle-leadership appears doubtful.

However, in the same way that Gunter (2013) argues that leadership and professional practice in the school system have been adversely affected by factors such as ‘over-inspection’, citing a head-teacher: “it’s a cold data-led profession” (p.103) [Emphasis added], where Ball (2014) recognises ‘education’, and those who work within it, as subject to ‘the tyranny of numbers’ (unpaged), whereby, as a consequence of particular discursive truths, individuals exercise ‘disciplined self-management’ (Ozga 2009, p.152), in their pre-occupations with data, the college middle-managers in this relatively small-scale study appear no different to those individuals who work in other educational contexts, such as schools and universities. While this situation might be of some concern, it is considered useful in the lending of credence and trustworthiness (Shenton 2004) to this research endeavour: the data generated being consistent with educational research studies made by those who are particularly industrious ‘in the field’; making contributions to policy and practice about FE middle-management; further substantiating neo-liberal hegemony in the context of education; where, in the neo-liberal imaginary (Ball 2012), particular meanings are privileged (Apple 2004, Lingard 2005).
Finally, in the consideration of policy and practice, Gunter (2013) writes: ‘in current neoliberal times principals would be well served by the production of multiple readings of their work, and deliberate efforts to construct more disruptive representations of “principalling” are required’ (Thomson 2001, cited in Gunter 2013, p.108). I consider such advice apposite in the context of the curriculum-based middle-manager; that their fixations with data be troubled, to contemplate alternative practices; practices which are authentically curriculum-focused. As Foucault urges:

What is philosophy today – I mean philosophical activity – if not the critical work of thought upon thought; if it does not, rather than legitimising what one already knows, consist of an attempt to know how and to what extent it is possible to think differently? (Foucault 1984, cited in Martin 1995, p.57)

In challenging the existing focus of middle-managers’ work, discursive regimes that privilege data-centric practices might be disrupted; disrupted so that the hortatory rhetoric of recent education reform, which claims: ‘Learners are at the heart of the FE and skills system’ (BIS 2011, p.5), can be earnestly realised.

Furthering the study

This study, while relatively small in scale, is useful for developing research agenda for two very specific reasons. Firstly, I propose that it is welcome if, in any way, it serves as a stimulus for any future research endeavour that contributes to knowledge about an under-researched education sector which enrols in excess of four million students each year (Arnett 2013). Secondly, this particular study corroborates those studies within other educational contexts that demonstrate the dominance of numbers and data, as the ‘neoliberal state re-works its form and modalities’ (Ball 2014, unpaged). Consequently, while there may be ‘gaps’ in FE sector research, this study, in plugging one such gap, shows that its findings are largely consistent with others located outside the FE sector (e.g. Ball 2013; Gunter 2012; Ozga 2009) who similarly recognise the disciplining effects of data upon particular subject-positions within other educational contexts e.g. school headteachers, teachers and academic researchers. Thus, when educational researchers and writers produce knowledge in other educational contexts, future FE researchers might attend to pertinent parallels within the FE sector, particularly
where consistencies are likely to remain within a neoliberal order; attending to the ways in which such parallels, and differences, are manifested, and why.

In the consideration of the development of research agenda related, specifically, to the work of the FE middle-manager, this study suggests that, when considering the design of future research endeavours, curriculum-based middle-managers are recognised as very distinct from those service-based college middle-managers whose work, while making important contributions to the successful operation of FE colleges, precludes pedagogic concerns. This and previous studies have shown (Briggs 2005, Page 2011) that the FE middle-manager is largely focused on the securing and implementation of policy. However, while this is the case, the ‘business of learning’ (Ainley and Bailey, 1997) that occurs within specific college curriculum areas, and which is the fundamental purpose of the FE College, cannot be secured in the same ways as the meeting of, for instance, energy-reduction targets within Estates functions. The business of learning involves learners; learners who, as individuals, are unique. Moreover, in the consideration of teaching staff who, as Hattie (2012, p.32) observes: ‘work in remarkably varied situations, have interactions with many different students … with much variance in conditions (planning times, interruptions, collaborative opportunities)’, social considerations are significant. They are significant because they are characterised by messiness and difference, the antithesis of conformity and compliance, and where learning and teaching are wholly dependent on social interactions; social interactions which rely upon emotional sensibilities, that are often finely attuned and, crucially, permit misunderstanding.

Consequently, in the securing of learning by learners, through teachers and teaching, teachers who, in some cases are also lower middle-managers, this study suggests that future attention should be given to the de-socialising effects of college policies and how, through their discursive capturing of institutional actors i.e. middle-managers, senior-managers and teachers, social interactions and social relationships are rendered vulnerable. Still further, it calls for future studies which acknowledge differences between middle-management layers and the likelihood, or otherwise, of effective curriculum middle-leadership where middle-managers at more senior levels no longer engage in, or have limited experience of, pedagogic
work; failing to appreciate the labour-intensiveness of pedagogy and its inherent complexity; and how performative discourses, centred upon metrics, erode possibilities for alternative ways of working, as well as thinking.

Finally, this study demonstrates the efficacy of Foucauldian conceptualisations, in the form of archaeology for the productive analysis of documentation, and genealogy for the analysis, and making clear, of social practices. Moreover, it shows how these ‘thinking tools’ are complementary; how the ‘rules and regularities’ inherent within discursive arrangements create specific ‘conditions of possibility’ that shape social action and modes of practice. As Jean Anyon (2009) observes:

Foucault’s theory fosters analysis of a micro-physics of the circulation of power in daily activity and the consequences of this as we study how power (and the systems of knowledge that instantiate and legitimate it) produce people and is produced by them. (p.14)

Moreover, Foucault’s ‘gleaming words’ (Ball 2013) and the deployment of his theoretical constructs enable ‘descriptions, understandings and explanations that could not be generated otherwise’ (Gunter, Hall and Mills 2014, p.163). Consequently, the use of Foucault can plausibly be considered for future research endeavours in those spheres where there are actors – ‘subjects’ - who engage in social practices; social practices which are influenced and shaped by particular ‘truths’; ‘truths’ that are determined through specific knowledge-power configurations.
REFERENCES


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TES (Times Educational Supplement) (2012b), ‘*A-level no-fail guarantee may double to £10,000*’. 6 April, 50-51.

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Appendix A

Summary Descriptions of the three General FE Colleges

The three General Further Education colleges to be used as the sources for data collection (middle-manager semi-structured interviews and institutional policy documents) are approximately situated within a 30 mile radius of each other. They are each located in separate boroughs. The following descriptions are taken directly from each of the colleges most recent OFSTED Inspection reports.

East College

East College is a medium sized general further education college. It serves a diverse local community; a range of measures, such as the multiple deprivation indices, show there are significant areas of severe deprivation within the borough. In 2009/10 the college recruited 1,893 learners aged 16 to 18 and 4,993 adults, with 200 14 to 16-year-old students undertaking vocational activities through partnerships and cooperation with local schools. There were around 500 learners on apprenticeship programmes and 800 on Train to Gain programmes. Twenty per cent of learners were from minority-ethnic backgrounds. The highest proportions of enrolments for both age groups were on intermediate level provision.

Central College

Central College is a medium sized general further education college. The college has around 8,000 enrolled students. Of these around 2,000 were full-time students aged 16 to 18 and 2,500 part-time adult students. The college delivers community provision in a range of venues in the local area, employer sponsored programmes to around 2,000 learners and an apprentice programme to 600 work-based learners. In collaboration with 7 local schools around 500 learners aged 14 to 16 study level 1 and level 2 vocational courses. Government statistics indicate that [the town where Central College is situated] has significant levels of deprivation. Unemployment in the town is rising and is above the national rate. Of those in employment the average wage of the local area is 86% of the national rate.

West College

West College is a large general further education college. The college has over 11,000 students, the majority of whom are adults. Around 4,000 learners are aged 16 to 18. Some 30% of 16 to 18 year olds and 20% of adult learners are from a minority ethnic background. The curriculum includes courses at all levels from pre-entry to degree and postgraduate degree. Within the college’s student catchment area there is a sixth form college and three schools with sixth forms. The borough in which the college is located has high levels of deprivation and unemployment is high. In the locality 12.2% are not in education, employment or training and a further 9% of young people are in jobs without training. Almost 900 students have a learning difficulty and/or disability in 2006/07.

57 I am employed as a full-time FE/HE lecturer at West College.
Appendix B – East College Strategic Plan

Figure 1. Strategic Plan extract: Mission, Vision, Strategic Objectives & Key Milestones for Quality of Provision

**Mission** – Why we are here

Inspiring learners to succeed in life and work

We will deliver the mission by:

- Recognising and bringing out the talents of our learners
- Helping develop skills and achieving qualifications to increase the employability of all learners
- Enabling learners to make a positive contribution to College life and the wider community
- Developing learners’ commitment to their own learning and development
- Working with employers and partners to enhance learning opportunities

**Vision** – What we want to become

To be an Outstanding college, widely recognised for:

- Excellence in teaching, learning, support and progression to and in employment

**Strategic objectives**

Over the next three years we will:

**Quality of provision**

1. Have consistently high learner success rates in all areas, and for all learners
2. Equip all learners with employability skills relating to communication, numeracy, teamwork and enterprise
3. Establish and maintain a reputation as inclusive, where all learners are respected and valued equally
4. Develop industry-standard vocational skills in learners
5. Support learners into further learning, employment or self-employment

**Key milestones for the current college year are:**

**Quality of provision**

- Improve 16-18 and 19+ long learner success rates overall by 1% or to 82% whichever is higher, increase 16-18 level 3 learner success rates by 2%
- Improve Employer specific courses and Apprenticeship timely learner success rates by 2%
- All 16-18 full-time learners to undertake appropriate functional skills and achieve a 70% learner success rate
- 85% of lessons graded Good or better for Teaching and Learning with 10% Outstanding and no unsatisfactory lessons
- Address equality gaps in learner success rates
- All learner programmes perform to a Good standard
Appendix B.1 – East College Strategic Plan (Learner and Employment references)

**Figure 2.** The conjoining of the referent ‘learner’ with the referent ‘employment’ (and its correlates) within East College’s Strategic Plan

Inspiring learners to succeed in life and work *(ref: Mission statement)*

Helping develop skills and achieving qualifications to increase the employability of all learners *(ref: Mission delivery statement number 2)*

Working with employers and partners to enhance learning opportunities *(ref: Mission delivery statement number 5)*

Excellence in teaching, learning, support and progression to and in employment *(ref: Vision statement number 1)*

 Equip all learners with employability skills relating to communication, numeracy, teamwork and enterprise *(ref: Strategic Objective number 2)*

Develop industry-standard vocational skills in learners *(ref: Strategic Objective number 4)*

Support learners into further learning, employment or self-employment *(ref: Strategic Objective number 5)*

Improve Employer specific courses and Apprenticeship timely learner success rates by 2% *(ref: Key milestone number 2)*
Appendix C – Central College Strategic Plan

Figure 1. Strategic Plan: Purpose, Strategic Objectives and Current Strategic Priorities

**Purpose**

Building futures, changing lives

**Strategic objectives**

1. To develop mature and confident young people through excellent sixth form education with academic and vocational pathways

2. To significantly expand the local range of opportunities for university-level study while maintaining high standards

3. To make a significant contribution to the local, regional and national economy through enhancing the personal growth and employability of individuals

4. To maintain teaching and learning and all business support processes at an excellent standard

5. To promote a culture of excellence where all staff have high aspirations

6. To assure stable financial health, value for money and environmental sustainability

**Current strategic priorities**

(i) To maintain an excellent success rate of 80% or above with high levels of both retention and achievement

(ii) To achieve a positive value added score for all programmes and an average overall score of +0.4

(iii) To maintain measured good or better teaching grades in excess of 80%

(iv) To achieve planned targets in respect of the major funding bodies for HE and FE

(v) To demonstrate significant progress in implementing the Employer Engagement Strategy and specifically to achieve the targets for employer-facing programmes

(vi) To demonstrate high levels of staff engagement, morale and support whilst maintaining a safe and secure environment as a basis for outstanding performance
(vii) To demonstrate equality of opportunity in achieving the above goals
Appendix D – West College Strategic Plan

Figure 1. West College Strategic Plan: Mission, Vision, Values statements and Strategic objectives (One – Six)

West College Strategic Plan

Mission Statement

Raise aspirations through learning for the benefit of individuals, communities and the economy.

Vision statement

Aspiring, innovating and achieving together

Values statement

- Equality, success and respect
- Strive for excellence
- Realise potential
- Contribute positively to our community
- Committed to our learners
- Work as a team and collaborate

Strategic objectives

Theme One – Quality and support:

1. Set high expectations to promote the consistent achievement of aspirational learning goals
2. Provide a range of learning opportunities, services and support relevant to the needs of individuals and employers
3. Promote equality actively, support diversity and cohesion and tackle discrimination through innovative strategies

Theme Two – Our students and staff:

4. Take action to ensure a safe environment. Promote individual understanding and responsibility for safety and well-being
5. Provide a supportive environment for all staff encouraging personal well-being and professional development
6. Develop a clear and open communication and engagement strategy

Theme Three – Our resources:

7. Provide a vibrant learning environment to meet the needs and expectations of the College community
8. Ensure accountability, financial stability and the effective use of resources
9. Reduce the resource intensity and energy consumption associated with learning
## Key strategic priorities

(i) Curriculum Mapping/Strategy HE/FE – Mapping our curriculum to maximise progression from FE to HE and target the funding available to local need

(ii) Commercial/International – Driving up Commercial and International income through effective planning, resourcing and marketing

(iii) Internal Progression – Promoting the journey from Entry Level right through to Professional courses

(iv) Enhanced Business Planning Model for 2012/13 to agreed timescales

(v) Observation Process Review FE/HE – Ensuring best practice is shared and a robust approach to the scrutiny of grades

(vi) Management Training at all levels – Promoting individual accountability

(vii) Continuous Improvement for Enhancement – Keeping ahead of the competition through innovation and achievement

(viii) Targeted Intervention – Targeting ‘lower performing’ areas to maximise success

(ix) Review of the Quality Structure – To ensure it meets the needs of both FE and HE and the implementation of ‘best practice’ findings

(x) Enhanced Student Finance Offer – To remain the ‘best in Pennine Lancashire’

(xi) Maturity of Systems and Procedures - Further development of systems and procedures to provide ‘the right tools’ for the job

(xii) Addressing the Learner and Staff Voice – Promoting and engaging with and responding to their Voice
Key Performance Indicators to Measure Progress against Strategic Objective One

(i) Achieve the College learner attendance targets of: 89% for full-time 16-18 year olds; 89% for part-time 16-18 year olds; 85% for 19+ full-time learners; 87% for part-time learners 19+; 85% for full-time HE learners; and 87% for part-time HE learners;

(ii) Achieve the College retention target for 2011/12 of: 91% for 16-18 year olds on long qualifications; 99% for 16-18 learners on short qualifications; 89% for 19+ learners on long qualifications; 98% for 19+ learners on short qualifications; and 82% for HEFCE-funded learners;

(iii) Achieve the College achievement target for 2011/12 of: 95% for 16-18 year olds on long qualifications; 99% for 16-18 learners on short qualifications; 95% for 19+ learners on long qualifications; 99% for 19+ learners on short qualifications; and 95% for HEFCE-funded learners;

(iv) Achieve the College success rate targets for 2011/12 of: 86% for 16-18 year olds on long qualifications; 98% for 16-18 learners on short qualifications; 85% for 19+ learners on long qualifications; 97% for 19+ learners on short qualifications; and 78% for HEFCE-funded learners;

(v) Achieve an 89% timely success rate for apprentices, 89% for advanced apprentices and 92% for Learning in the Workplace;

(vi) Achieve 95% good or better lesson observations;

(vii) Achieve 96% learner satisfaction survey for the full-time student survey.
## Appendix E – Middle-Manager names (aliases) and their respective job titles and middle-management hierarchical position within each of the three colleges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>East College</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle-management Job Title:</strong> Programme Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle-manager hierarchical position –</strong> Middle managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Report to:</strong> Senior Managers (i.e. Vice Principals)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reported to by:</strong> College lecturers and Trainer/Assessors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching duties:</strong> None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monica</td>
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<td>Nigel</td>
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<th><strong>West College</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Middle-management Job Title:</strong> Centre Head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle-manager hierarchical position –</strong> Senior managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Report to:</strong> College Executive Team (i.e. Principal and Vice-Principals)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reported to by:</strong> Curriculum Area Managers and Lecturers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching duties:</strong> None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gordon</td>
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<th><strong>Central College</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle-management Job Title:</strong> Curriculum Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle-manager hierarchical position –</strong> Lower managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Report to:</strong> Head of Division and Assistant Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reported to by:</strong> Lecturers and Trainer/Assessors (Latter in Vocational Trades only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching duties:</strong> 11 – 15 hours per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
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Appendix F

Participant Information Sheet

Constituting the managerial subject: A Foucauldian perspective

You are being invited to participate in a research project. The aim of the study is to explore the perspective of the middle manager in the FE context. It proposes to use the concepts of Michel Foucault (a French philosopher) to provide a theoretical framework for the research study. The research study contributes to a postgraduate doctoral qualification that I am studying part-time at Manchester University. Before you decide whether you wish to participate, it is important for you to understand why the study is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the study?

Tony Fort – Room PB111, St Paul’s Building, Blackburn College, Feilden Street, BB2 1LH

Title of the study

Constituting the managerial subject: A Foucauldian perspective

What is the aim of the study?

The overall aim of the research is to explore the work of the middle manager in the FE context by using theoretical concepts developed by Michel Foucault, a twentieth century French philosopher.

The objectives of the research are to explore how middle managers understand their work in relation to other key positions in the college, for example, senior management and other middle management positions, as well as in relation to the position of the teacher. The focus of the work is on the occupational positions of individuals, not specific individuals themselves. The research is also interested in exploring what middle managers understand to be the key themes and issues which influence their working practices on a regular basis.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been selected as you have been identified as a person working as a middle manager in an FE college.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?
You will be interviewed by me, Tony Fort, as the researcher. I will ask you a number of pre-written questions and I am interested in gathering your responses to my questions. You are free to seek clarification on any of the questions and, in the unlikely event that any questions make you feel uncomfortable, you are perfectly entitled to say that you do not wish to respond. If at any time you wish to end the interview that is fine, too.

**What happens to the data collected?**

The data will be recorded on audio-media (e.g. digital storage). The recording will then be transcribed (typed up) onto paper. In this way I can then see if any of what you say corresponds to what someone else has also said. I will be looking for both similarities and differences in what people say. It is the intention that I can then report (anonymously) how people respond to the same questions – detailing the shared and different responses. Once the data has been transcribed onto paper, the audio recording will be destroyed.

**How is confidentiality maintained?**

Any data will only be held and stored by me. It will be stored at my home. Once I have transcribed the data I will destroy the audio recording immediately.

**Can I be identified through any of the contributions I make?**

Anonymity is absolutely central to this research project. All names of participants are changed (though these will reflect the gender and ethnicity of the participant e.g. Sally might become Jane, Rafiq might become Adil). The college name will also be changed. Any information that you provide during interview will be reported sensitively and ethically and I will send you a transcript of our interview to ensure that I have transcribed it factually and accurately.

**What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason [and without detriment to yourself]

**Will I be paid for participating in the study?**

You will not be paid for participating in this study.

**What is the duration of the study?**

It is envisaged that the interview will take no more than 45-50 minutes. I will ask to interview you once only.
Where will the study be conducted?

The interview will take place at a location convenient to you and where you feel happy to answer my questions.

Will the outcomes of the study be published?

The report which I produce from the research study will be part of my doctoral thesis. It may also form part of a journal paper I may submit to be considered for external publication e.g. Journal of Further and Higher Education.

Criminal Records Check (if applicable)

N/A

Contact for further information

If there is any aspect that you wish to discuss with me at any time, either before or after the interview, please do not hesitate to contact me. My contact details are:

Tony Fort
Room PB111
St. Paul's Building
Blackburn College
BB2 1LH
(01254) 292360
Mobile: 0779 2377 659
Email: t.fort@blackburn.ac.uk

What if something goes wrong?

If there is something that troubles you about the research, again before or afterwards, please contact me, as above.

If you wish to make a formal complaint about the conduct of the study please contact the Head of the Research Office, Christie Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL.
Appendix G

Study Title

*Constituting the Managerial subject: A Foucauldian perspective*

**CONSENT FORM**

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below.

1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet about the above study and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily. 

2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

3. I understand that the interviews will be audio-recorded and then destroyed once transcribed.

4. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes.

5. I agree that any data collected may be published in anonymous form in academic books or journals.

I agree to take part in the above project:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Person taking consent</th>
<th>Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
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</table>
Appendix H
Interview Schedule

1. What is your understanding of your role as a middle manager at {named college}?

2. Can you describe a typical day as a middle manager at {named college} – or if not, then what are the key activities that you invariably do?

3. What are the prevailing organizational themes and issues that impact on your position as a middle manager?

4. How do you perceive government policy impacts on the running of your college? How do you see how government policy translates directly to your own position as a middle manager?

5. How do you understand the position of middle manager in relation to the position of senior management? How do you see how it connects to senior management? Could you for example give me an example of an issue/theme where you have expended time and consideration that has arisen from senior management? Would you say this same issue might have caused similar demands on other middle managers?

6. How do you understand the position of middle manager in relation to the position of teacher? How do you see how it connects to the position of teacher?

7. What are the prevailing themes or issues that impact on you from teachers? Could you for example give me an example of an issue/theme where you have expended time or consideration that has arisen from teachers? Would you say this same issue might have caused similar demands on other middle managers?

8. What sort of management skills would you say you need that might be different, or are similar, between dealing with senior managers and teachers? For example, where you feel you might need negotiation skills with one and perhaps assertiveness skills with another?

9. How much control over your work do you consider you have? Do you perceive that your position is subject to frequent unexpected events and/or demands for example?

10. How do you see how you have developed and evolved as a manager over time? For example, how you understand senior managers perceive you? How teachers perceive you? How you perceive yourself?
APPENDIX I – Email correspondence to confirm interviews for two MMs at East College

From: Tony Fort
Sent: 28 May, 2012 14:52
To: [Gatekeeper@EastCollege]
Subject: Research Interviews
Attached: Participant_Information_Sheet (15.2K)

Dear [Gatekeeper],

Following our recent telephone conversation I look forward to meeting your two colleagues, Monica and Louise, who have kindly agreed to allow me to interview them separately on Friday, June 1st. May I also thank you again, [Gatekeeper], for arranging this on my behalf; I know how busy your staff will be at this time of year.

I have also attached a Participant Information Sheet which explains the purpose of the study to your colleagues. I would be most obliged if you could pass a copy on to them at your convenience.

Yours sincerely

Tony
From: Tony Fort
Sent: 12 November, 2012 11:24
To: [Gatekeeper@EastCollege]
Subject: Research Interview

Dear [Gatekeeper],

Following our recent telephone conversation I look forward to meeting your colleague, Nigel, who has kindly agreed to allow me to interview him on Friday, November 16th. Again, may I express my appreciation, [Gatekeeper], for arranging this third interview. I know that you and your staff will be very busy at this time of year.

I have also attached a Participant Information Sheet which explains the purpose of the study to your colleague, Nigel. I would be most obliged if you could pass a copy on to him at your convenience.

Best regards

Tony
From: Tony Fort
Sent: 6 August, 2012 09:27
To: [Matthew@CentralCollege]
Subject: Research Interview
Attached: Participant_Information_Sheet (15.2K)

Dear Matthew,

This is just a polite email to confirm arrangements that I will meet with you at [Central College] reception area tomorrow at 13:30. If there is likely to be any change to the plan, or you need to contact me for any reason, my mobile number is 0779 2377 659. I look forward to meeting you tomorrow and thank you for giving up your time to assist me in my study.

I have also attached a Participant Information Sheet which explains the purpose of the study, in more detail, to you. I would be most obliged if you could take the time to read it prior to the actual interview.

Best regards

Tony
From: Tony Fort
Sent: 22 October, 2012 11:03
To: [Harry@CentralCollege]
Subject: Research Interview

Dear Harry,

This is just a polite email to confirm arrangements that I will meet with you at Central College reception area tomorrow at 19:00. If for any reason you need to contact me, my mobile number is 0779 2377 659. Thank you for giving up your time to assist me in my study and I look forward to meeting you tomorrow evening.

I have also attached a Participant Information Sheet which explains the purpose of the study, in more detail, to you. I would be most obliged if you could take the time to read it prior to the actual interview.

Best regards

Tony
**Appendix M** - Email correspondence to confirm interview for MM3 at Central College

**From:** Tony Fort  
**Sent:** 18 February, 2013 10:12  
**To:** [Dave@CentralCollege]  
**Subject:** Research Interview  
**Attached:** Participant_Information_Sheet (15.2K)

Dear Dave,

Following our telephone conversation, this is just a polite email to confirm arrangements that I will meet with you at [Central College] reception on Wednesday, February 20th at 14:30. If for any reason you need to contact me, my mobile number is 0779 2377 659. Thank you for giving up your time to assist me in my study and I look forward to meeting you tomorrow afternoon.

I have also attached a Participant Information Sheet which explains the purpose of the study, in more detail, to you. I would be most obliged if you could take the time to read it prior to the actual interview.

Best regards

Tony
From: Tony Fort  
To: [Barbara@WestCollege]  
Subject: Research Interview  
Attached: Participant_Information_Sheet (15.2K)

Dear Barbara,

This is just a polite email to confirm arrangements that I will meet with you at your office in [Room Number] at 11:15 tomorrow. If there is likely to be any change to the plan, or you need to contact me for any reason, my staffroom telephone number is [Internal staffroom telephone number] or I can be contacted on my mobile number 0779 2377 659. Thank you for giving up your time to assist me in my study.

I know that [Gatekeeper@WestCollege] has previously provided you with a Participant Information Sheet when approaching you to seek your willingness to participate in the study, and I have attached it again in the event that you wish to remind yourself about the purpose of the study and are unable to locate the originally provided copy.

Best regards

Tony
From: Tony Fort  
Sent: 16 August, 2012 11:26  
To: [Amanda@WestCollege]  
Subject: Research Interview  
Attached: Participant_Information_Sheet (15.2K)

Dear Amanda,

Following our telephone conversation this morning, this is a polite email to confirm our arrangements that I will meet with you in [Room Number] at 16:00 tomorrow. If you need to contact me for any reason prior to then, my staffroom telephone number is [Internal staffroom telephone number] or I can be contacted on my mobile number 0779 2377 659. Thank you for giving up your time to assist me in my study.

I know that [Gatekeeper@WestCollege] has previously provided you with a Participant Information Sheet when approaching you to seek your willingness to participate in the study, and I have attached it again in the event that you wish to remind yourself about the purpose of the study and are unable to locate the originally provided copy.

Best regards

Tony
From: Tony Fort
Sent: 02 May, 2013 14:50
To: [Gordon@WestCollege]
Subject: Research Interview

Dear Gordon,

Thank you for agreeing to allow me to interview you tomorrow afternoon. This is a polite email to confirm our arrangements that I will meet with you in your office [Room Number] at 16:30 tomorrow. If you need to contact me before then, my staffroom telephone number is [Internal staffroom telephone number] or I can be contacted on my mobile number 0779 2377 659. Thank you for giving up your time to assist me in my study, I know how busy you will be at this time of the college year.

I know that [Gatekeeper@WestCollege] has previously provided you with a Participant Information Sheet when approaching you to seek your willingness to participate in the study, and I have attached it again in the event that you wish to remind yourself about the purpose of the study and are unable to locate the originally provided copy.

Best regards

Tony
APPENDIX Q – First-stage constructs: Central College (Lower Middle-manager: Harry)

Q. What is your understanding of your role as a MM at BC and you did say you did some teaching, didn’t you?

Yes. Yes. If you’re talking about my role specifically I see it as being a link person between the Senior Management and the Programme Leaders and Tutors within the Division. So I think that’s my main function, ensuring that what the College wants to happen is managed by people such as me effectively so that things get done. That’s how I see the role; it’s that link.

Q. So would you say you’re a Curriculum Leader, then?

I don’t lead on the curriculum, I don’t say what needs to happen; I don’t impose curriculum upon them. If as a manager we need to draw down additional funds or we have a shortfall in some areas, I might suggest we do some additional units to boost funds but I wouldn’t directly lead on the curriculum. So if there’s a Vocational Area for example, there would be the curriculum within that area and if there were any adjustments to it or any changes to it I would have to be aware of that. So I’d have to have links with BTEC and Edexcel and all the Awarding Bodies, I’d have to be aware of what’s going on.

Q. So does that mean you have targets, when you said if there’s a shortfall?

Yes, we have Targets. Yes. Yes.

Q. So how is that decided?

Senior Management decide on that. And again it’s filtered down. It goes from the Principalship down to Heads of Division and then to Middle-managers. So they have Targets, we, as Curriculum Managers, then have Targets. And the Targets, I would say, for the Tutors and for Programme Leaders is to ensure that any learner that comes into their area stays on programme and succeeds. So they’re very general Targets but -complete the year and pass everything they’re given! That basic, you know?!

Q. So could you describe a typical day at the college and if you can’t what are they key activities that you invariably do?

A typical day would be ... do you want me to just run through a day?

Q. Yes, yes.

A typical day, I get in about eight o’clock in the morning, first thing I do is I go into the office and switch on the computer. Get myself a drink, wait for emails to load up etc. and then just go through emails and the calendar. But obviously I keep in touch
with this outside of the college as well because we all have mobiles and we’re all given those so we can keep in touch and communicate outside of college as well.

Q. So when you say outside of college …

Well, every manager has a mobile or has some means, we have Moodle Access and all that you know so some managers do use that in the evening and send emails at the weekend and keep in touch at weekend and things like this [2.52]

Q. So is that Standard Practice?

Some do it more than others.

Q. So are they on call?

I wouldn’t say they’re on-call; some people can access it, so some choose to do so, don’t they. Personally, I don’t. Personally, what I do is I manage my time up until leaving here and then I deliberately don’t go back into it … because I feel I’m here first thing every day eight o’clock and I’m here quite late most evenings as well so I think in those times I manage to

Q. So how late do you work?

Well this evening is a late evening. I do one evening class a week and we usually have an event once a week. So it’s usually nine o’clock on both occasions. So my teaching evening’s this evening which clashes with an interview evening which is why I’m up and down cos we’ve interviews as well.

So a typical day, I would go in, I would log on, I would check what’s there to be done because there’ll be communications with other managers, with Student Services and there would be tasks to do to make sure certain things happen at a certain time. So then I would make contact with whoever, in the Staffroom, to check they know what they’re doing. And to ensure they’re doing things that I’m expecting them to do at the times I want them doing, if you see what I mean.

Q. So could you give me an example?

An example would be this year we’ve introduced a 42-day qualification, so that has to be completed, passed, by the 42 days, by all students within the Division. So that means I’ve got to track every learner on every Full-Time programme and ensure that every tutor has done all the work necessary for them to sit their exam. But I’ve also been managing the exam papers as well, so I’ve been doing … getting the paperwork, invigilating the exams, doing that. That’s one. The other one is Induction SPOC. You know, SPOCS? They’re feedback forms, on-line. Feedback. So it’s Students’ Perceptions Of College. We have one for all new students now. So every student, when they log on, it will pop-up that they need to complete the questionnaire; I have to track that every student does that … cos I can go on to
PageFinder and check every course and look at the Returns of every student on those courses. So they're two that are current. The other one is ensuring that they're all registered for Functional Skills, Maths and English. The other one is ensuring that they're all registered for their qualifications, cos they all have to be done at this time. The other one is ensuring that we get all the learners removed that need removing before we register.
APPENDIX R – Second-order constructs: Central College (MM practices around Data-metrics)

Harry

We have Targets.

We, as Curriculum Managers, then have Targets. And the Targets, I would say, for the Tutors and for Programme Leaders is to ensure that any learner that comes into their area stays on programme and succeeds. So they’re very general Targets but – complete the year and pass everything they’re given! That basic, you know?!

I have to track that every student does that ... cos I can go on to PageFinder and check every course and look at the Returns of every student on those courses. So they’re two that are current. The other one is ensuring that they’re all registered for Functional Skills, Maths and English. The other one is ensuring that they’re all registered for their qualifications, cos they all have to be done at this time. The other one is ensuring that we get all the learners removed that need removing before we register

Dave

The main concern is success rates. We need to maintain those. We need to make sure we’re hitting them against the national benchmarks and not performing at the minimum level, which varies for each individual Sector Area. We need to look at, and our main target really is striving to achieve above 80% and drive the Success Rates up above 80% over time. The other prevailing issue is, and we’re in Construction, are currently going through periods of high unemployment within Construction which is very challenging for us. Not only to recruit, but also to keep people on the programmes that they’re on. And keep them employed. And we have an unwritten policy within this Division that wherever a person’s unemployed, laid-off, made redundant; we’ll try our hardest to find them a job within four working weeks, to keep them on-programme. That’s one of the tough targets.

Matthew

When it comes to delivering ... I think it’s, we’ve improved, from when I first started there’s been an improvement, but it’s very slow! [Laughs] And I think the other thing, as a key theme for us really, in terms of from management, is massively, Success rates. Success. We take so many students on in the first year, we want those students to progress to the second year, and then to progress on to university or work at the end of the second year and we’ve got targets in terms of national rates and value added, positive value added and I think this year getting students to progress from first year to second year is a massive target. We’re very very very aware of that.
Appendix S

The ‘thick layer’ of FE Middle-management: senior, middle and lower

Senior Management (Principal and Chief Executive, Vice-principals/Assistant principals)

Senior Middle-Management

Middle Middle-Management

Lower Middle Management

Lecturer/Teachers, Trainer/Assessors
Appendix S1

The reporting structure of MM cases (Middle MMs) at East College (A medium-sized college in NW England)

Key:
↑ Direct reporting

Senior Management (Principal, Assistant principals)

Assistant Principal

Absent

Middle Middle-Management

Absent

The 3 MM cases – Louise, Monica and Nigel

Lecturer/Teachers, Trainer/Assessors
Appendix S2

The reporting structure of the MM cases (Lower MMs) at Central College - (A medium-sized college in NW England)
Appendix S3

The reporting structure of the MM cases (Senior MM) at West College - (A large-sized college in NW England)
## Appendix T

Key Policy Reports, Events and Legislation in FE since 1991 to the present

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Policy Report, Event or Legislation</th>
<th>Year</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Further and Higher Education Act – commonly referred to by those working within the FE sector at the time as ‘Incorporation’</td>
<td>1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishment of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) – created by the Further and Higher Education Act</td>
<td>1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning and Skills Act</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning and Skills Council replaces Further Education Funding Council</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEFC Inspectorate replaced by Ofsted to inspect 16-19 provision</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Success for All – Reforming Further Education and Training’ - DFES</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Skills for Sustainable Growth’ - BIS</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills Funding Agency and Young Peoples’ Learning Agency replaces Learning and Skills Council</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Review of Vocational Education’ - The Wolf Report</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Act</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Peoples’ Learning Agency replaced by the Education Funding Agency</td>
<td>2012</td>
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