Book Reviews

Moses (Ingrid) and Rose (Ernest) *Heading a Department: A Guide for Heads and Chairs of Departments and Schools*. Kensington, HERDSA, 1988. 60 p. (Eng) (HERDSA Green Guide, No. 9) incl. bibl. MFN 1805-CALL No: AU-43 MOS ISBN 0-908557-12-4

I am sure that both established and aspiring heads of departments would benefit from reading and reflecting on this well-researched and closely argued booklet. Its publication is timely, as far-reaching and radical changes are now taking place in the organization and management of universities in the United Kingdom. There are also parallel developments in some other European countries. These changes place increasing burdens and new challenges on heads of department.

Briefly, if I take my own University as a typical example, the Vice-Chancellor is now very much the Chief Executive. A head of school (ie a large department or a number of smaller departments) is appointed for a fixed term by the Vice-Chancellor, and is clearly accountable to him or her and the other senior managers in the University. Heads of school are regarded as 'line managers' and have considerable responsibilities for resources: human, financial and physical. The heads' power is underlined by a staff development and appraisal scheme. Government pressure, arising from a long-standing conviction that universities should become more efficient, more accountable, more business-like, is driving these changes.

In this review I will focus on some of the issues that I believe are central to effective headship in this rapidly changing situation. Since 1984, John Adair has directed a series of 'leadership courses' for senior academics from universities in the United Kingdom. He argues that the most crucial questions heads must resolve for themselves are: 'What is the difference between leadership and management?' and 'What does leadership mean in an academic institution?' Moses and Roe do not address these questions quite as sharply as I would have preferred. Management is important – it is essential to get the departmental 'machine' running smoothly. But, in the long term, it is leadership that matters. In particular, a head, working together with the staff, must be able to develop a vision for the future of the department and a plan to ensure its implementation. It is the head's responsibility to provide much of the inspiration and enthusiasm for this difficult and often threatening task. Fortunately, readers will find much helpful guidance on planning and maintaining morale in this booklet (pp. 12-17).

The introduction of staff development and appraisal schemes (which is dealt with succinctly on pp. 23-26) has been a major innovation in universities in the United Kingdom over the last year or so. But the guidance on dealing with staff who, in the eyes of their head, are not 'pulling their weight' is not very helpful, despite the finding from the authors' own research that this is the part of the job that heads dislike most of all! In fact, we read: 'To staff who abuse the relative freedom of their position you can point out the advantages of early retirement or fractional appointment commensurate to their contribution to the department' (p. 26).

The section on interpersonal relations rightly emphasizes the importance of 'active listening' (p. 30). But, having listened, what then? Kouzes and Posner identify four qualities that followers look for in assessing the credibility of their leaders: honesty, competence, vision, enthusiasm, the most important of these being honesty. The ability to be honest, especially in tense and problematic situations, is by no means easy as Argyris and Schon have repeatedly emphasized, but unsatisfactory performance must be confronted, explored and resolved. An honest approach, focusing on the *alleged* unsatisfactory behaviour and not the personality of the member of staff involved, and allowing both sides to explain

their position and have this discussed, must surely be the way forward. A directive or manipulative approach can only produce short-term benefits, and the underlying problem will be magnified and new problems will emerge if the dispute is not solved! As the authors say: 'Unresolved conflict may poison a whole department and jeopardise your management leadership' (p. 31).

The important points about time management (p. 40), it seems to me, are to have clear priorities (perhaps developing that vision for the future of the department and how it is to be realized) and to reserve one's best working time (be it first thing in the morning or last thing at night) for those tasks. A 'golden rule' which the authors miss is 'to handle each piece of paper once'. I am also convinced that there is no substitute for 'management by walking about'. Heads need to make the time to join their staff for coffee and generally get out of their offices away from their protective secretaries and administrators!

I enjoyed the case studies – they brought the booklet to life and stimulated my interest (particularly those on pp. 45-51). Some examples and discussion of 'mission statements' could usefully have been added to the all too brief section on strategic planning (p.12). There is, as I have already noted, some very good advice on developing an action plan for the future development of the department (pp. 13-15) but, here again, an example would have been welcome. There is rather too much rhetoric but perhaps that is inevitable in such a short volume.

Following the pioneering work of John Adair, many universities in the United Kingdom now provide management development programmes for their department and school heads. It would be no bad thing if this inexpensive but highly informative booklet was circulated to the participants as 'essential reading'. For myself, I will look forward to reviewing the greatly expanded version of this booklet which is now in preparation.

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