

Creating a Cohesive Front Between a Headteacher and School Business Leader

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What is the meaning of 'Cohesive'?

- describes something that sticks together literally or figuratively
(Merriam- Webster)
- something that is cohesive consists of parts that fit together and form a united whole
(Collins Dictionary)

Where did it all begin?

- brief history/overview
- 'The Rise of the School Business Manager', Guardian 2013



'The Rise of the School Business Manager'

Few professions have risen so far so fast as that of school business manager. As recently as 15 years ago, the post was virtually unknown in the maintained sector; now it is an integral part of senior leadership teams in many schools, with its importance only likely to grow as schools become more and more autonomous.

For many of its long-standing practitioners, their role has followed a similar trajectory, expanding as the range of areas for which schools are responsible has multiplied until it has become an accepted part of school management.

As well as writing the budget, the SBM is also responsible for premises management, plays a role in recruitment and manages the 25 non-teaching staff. Her background means she is also called upon for everything from fixing computers to helping out if the dinner ladies are one short. "I handle everything that isn't teaching," she says.

Her responsibilities encompass HR, school business management, whole school CPD and leadership and management development, while she also works closely with the finance, IT and admin teams.

The development of the SBM role has been particularly apparent in academies. Completely outside the local authority sphere, academies have taken financial independence to the next level, meaning a corresponding emphasis on the business role.

So where are we now?

“Smart working for SMBs” in 2021 stated that the key challenges for SBMs were:

- The impact of the pandemic
- Workload pressures
- A lack of support
- The widening education gap
- Budgetary demand



“It’s hard to do the ‘day job’ sometimes when you’re constantly firefighting.”

“Too much to do, too little time.”

NAHT report, 2022

NAHT report January 2022 “School Business Leadership in Crisis?”

Successful schools require a holistic approach to leadership with the pedagogical and business aspects effectively integrated. The work that school business leaders and their teams undertake form the foundations upon which schools can thrive.

It is, however, a diverse profession and the title school business leader is often used to describe a variety of different roles. Some school business leaders work as part of a central team, others work in individual schools. Some are generalists covering a wide array of expectations – from finance to estate management – while others specialise in areas such as HR or operations. However, all are critical to the school system.

Key findings

- Almost a fifth (19%) of respondents are planning to leave within the next year.
- 70% reported increased worry fear or stress about their job.

NAHT Report Recommendations:


- raise the professional status of school business leaders within the sector and schools. This should include working with the sector to develop materials and guidance on how schools can embed and maximise the impact of school business leaders within their staffing structure
- “ Excessive workload has long been recognised as a driver of leadership attrition, but often it “ hasn’t been considered in relation to school business leaders”

“Sustainable improvement in multi-school groups” by Professor Toby Grearly, DfE,
December 2018

Director argued, there was also a need to retain high levels of trust so that school leaders would give an honest assessment of their school’s strengths and weaknesses.


Getting these issues and relationships right was a constant balancing act. On the one hand it required ‘self-confident, high quality leadership in schools, rather than leadership that is told what to do,’ as one Executive Head in an average performing MAT put it. Without self-confident leadership in schools there was a risk of a dependency culture, or ‘learned helplessness’, which could be a drain on the resources and time of the core team.

Key to the success of these models is that they are based on an open and respectful culture which ensures that there are ‘no surprises’ and ‘no blame’.



High quality and responsive back-office services, in particular in the areas of HR and finance, saved time and effort for school-based leaders so they could focus on school improvement.

That frees us up to do the important bit which is the teaching and learning. When I was in an LA school, the headteacher spent hours and hours making sure that the budget balanced. I don't; an accountant brings me a budget and I tell him what I want ... but each school isn't an identikit ... the 6-year-olds here don't feel like they're in a corporate environment, they feel like they are in a nurturing, engaging primary school, which is what you want.



Back-office services were described by many school-based interviewees as consistently high quality and effective; where this was so, it could free up money (which could then be spent on school improvement) and save time and effort for school-based leaders. However, developing high quality back-office services was not always easy for our case study MATs and federations, particularly smaller ones that lacked scale.

Partnership!

7 Principles of Public Life NGA Report:

Selflessness School and college leaders should act solely in the interest of children and young people.

Integrity School and college leaders must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. Before acting and taking decisions, they must declare and resolve openly any perceived conflict of interest and relationships.

Objectivity School and college leaders must act and take decisions impartially and fairly, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias. Leaders should be dispassionate, exercising judgement and analysis for the good of children and young people.

Accountability School and college leaders are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

Openness School and college leaders should expect to act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from scrutiny unless there are clear and lawful reasons for doing so.

Honesty School and college leaders should be truthful.

Leadership School and college leaders should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles, and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs. Leaders include both those who are paid to lead schools and colleges and those who volunteer to govern them.

Schools and colleges serve children and young people and help them grow into fulfilled and valued citizens. As role models for the young, how we behave as leaders is as important as what we do.

Leaders should show leadership through the following personal characteristics or virtues:

TRUST | leaders are trustworthy and reliable We hold trust on behalf of children and should be beyond reproach. We are honest about our motivations. **WISDOM** | leaders use experience, knowledge and insight We demonstrate moderation and self-awareness. We act calmly and rationally. We serve our schools and colleges with propriety and good sense.

KINDNESS | leaders demonstrate respect, generosity of spirit, understanding and good temper We give difficult messages humanely where conflict is unavoidable. **JUSTICE** | leaders are fair and work for the good of all children We seek to enable all young people to lead useful, happy and fulfilling lives.

SERVICE | leaders are conscientious and dutiful We demonstrate humility and self-control, supporting the structures, conventions and rules which safeguard quality. Our actions protect high-quality education.

COURAGE | leaders work courageously in the best interests of children and young people We protect their safety and their right to a broad, effective and creative education. We hold one another to account courageously.

OPTIMISM | leaders are positive and encouraging Despite difficulties and pressures, we are developing excellent education to change the world for the better.



Challenging or challenged?

Reactive or proactive?

Involvement in the SLT?



What if?

What can you do?

Managing up

WHAT IS MANAGING UP?

When you manage up, you influence your manager in making decisions or taking action that's in the best interest of the organisation. While the idea of managing the person you report to may sound strange, it's quite common, and we have experience doing this.

A senior leader who needs managing up might be one or more of the following:

- Brand new,
- Completely hands-off or distracted,
- A micromanager,
- Inexperienced with teaching and learning,
- A know-it-all, or
- Indecisive.

HOW TO MANAGE UP

Below are four areas to consider to improve your communication, build trust, and take action to manage up skillfully. We use the acronym AAHH to remember these.

Ask: Speak to your leader to learn more about the issue. Be sure to ask clarifying questions—perhaps there's more to the issue than you thought. And listen to what your leader has to say. Asking questions will give you background information to help you understand your boss's perspective as you work toward a solution. It also creates a shared understanding of the issue. Asking questions is essential for creating openness and trust with your supervisor.

Adjust: A big part of managing up involves adjusting to your leader's leadership or work style. It's important to speak your leader's language. Some leaders prefer brevity, some want to see a detailed plan mapped out, and some want to be an active part of the solution.

Some leadership styles:

- Micromanager
- Indecisive
- All-knowing

Heart or Head?: Some leaders respond more to emotions, while others prefer facts. To convince the former, it helps to share stories and feelings behind your proposal. State your intention. Share how it might make a positive difference for specific people and the organisation. If appropriate, share a brief story or scenario about a student or an educator.


Other leaders are influenced less by emotion and more by reason, data, and projections. In these cases, make sure the solution you propose is evidence based. If your leader needs more data, be sure to fill in any necessary background information. Choosing the right approach is critical because some leaders are influenced more by their heart, while others are more likely to follow their head.

Hands: Don't just dump a new proposal on your leaders desk. Be sure to explain precisely how you intend to help with this task or ask how you can contribute. Not only will it show that you're solution-oriented (not just complaining), but also it can build trust and buy-in.

In every scenario, the key is to communicate frequently with your leader. While initially it might seem like your leader is a roadblock to the work you'd like to accomplish, with planning and a few adjustments you can make a difference from wherever you are within the organisation and ultimately boost your job satisfaction.

Challenging times

‘The most dangerous thing for any leader is to be surrounded by team members who agree with everything she says. We all need challengers, as well as champions – people who are prepared to tell us honestly if they think we’ve misjudged a situation, to present alternative points of view and additional ideas.’



‘No leader, at any level, has a monopoly on initiative. Everyone can be wrong. It’s how disagreements and alternative perspectives are handled that is key. If you need the person you lead to be receptive and responsive, present your ideas positively and constructively, and not in such a way that the leader feels her authority is being unhelpfully challenged. Senior leaders work closely with the headteacher, and can model effective leadership practices and demonstrate how to get the best from others. Unless the head is seriously lacking in self-awareness, she should see how the senior team does this, which may help her adjust or improve her own leadership practices. If the head makes a mistake, her senior team needs to discuss this honestly behind closed doors. If the senior leaders don’t tell the head the truth, who will?’




1. If your leader makes poor decisions,
consider specific alternative courses of
action and their benefit

If You're Being led by a Bad Leader, Try Managing Upwards by Jill Berry

2. You should be loyal

If You're Being led by a Bad Leader, Try Managing Upwards by Jill Berry




3. Focus on being the best SBM you can
be and ensure the team you lead are
effective

If You're Being led by a Bad Leader, Try Managing Upwards by Jill Berry

Strategies:


1. As far as you can, build on the positives
2. If you have a problem, consider possible solutions and alternative strategies
3. Be honest and open, but avoid putting leaders in difficult positions

If You're Being led by a Bad Leader, Try Managing Upwards by Jill Berry



‘Remember that you’re all on the same side – you all want the best teaching and care for the children. Working together to do this is far more productive than expending time and energy battling each other.’

If You’re Being led by a Bad Leader, Try Managing Upwards by Jill Berry



Remember also that inadequate leaders teach you more about effective leadership than great leaders do. You can learn from negative examples. When a leader makes a decision about which you have doubts, you get to hone your vision of the kind of leader you might be.