

REFORM RESPONSES

How Public Management Reforms Affect Managerial Relations and Loyalties in Education

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Abstract

Relations between professionals and managers in public domains are the subject of sharp controversies, especially in domains like education. According to public opinion, the rise of Managerialism has fuelled clashes between managers and professionals. In the past few years, academic research has mainly studied how management reforms affect professionals and their work. How managers, such as school managers, are affected has hardly been studied, however. This paper studies whether reforms, governance movements and new service ideals in Dutch secondary education lead to loyalty conflicts among school leaders, in order to understand changing manager-professional relationships. Our study shows how school leaders, seen as ‘critical agents’, respond to reform challenges by occupying new positions and entering into new relations. By emphasizing the notion of loyalty, we show how they perceive these relations, and which ‘relevant others’ they consider to be important. On the basis of a qualitative study, we will show that school leaders are important mediators of reforms. School leaders feel loyal to performance pressures, stakeholder expectations and new responsibilities, but they also feel loyal to teachers, work floors, and pupils. Their precise affective and normative allegiances affect whether school leaders consider reforms either as ‘burden’ or ‘opportunity’, and whether school leaders act ‘defensively’ or ‘offensively’, or resist strategic responses. Although reforms are frequently said to strengthen tensions between managers and teachers, managerial loyalty, as well as coping behaviour which stems from these loyalties, seems to be an important mechanism for preventing ‘clashes’ between professionals and managers.

Key words: Managerial reform, managers, loyalty, coping behavior

1. Introduction

Since the 1980s, Western public and non-profit services have faced intense reform pressures. In service sectors like health care and education, ‘governance’ mechanisms were introduced, in order to deregulate and decentralize service systems, and grant autonomies to

organizations. Service organizations like hospitals and schools have also been ‘managerialized’ – increasingly, they focus on efficiency, outputs and performances in order to produce ‘value for money’ and account for their actions. Consequently, we have witnessed the rise of public and non-profit ‘managers’, such as health care executives and school leaders, who occupy new positions and enter into new relations.

It is frequently suggested that management reforms ‘drive’ public and non-profit managers ‘away’ from professionals at work floors, such as teachers. Public management reforms are said to increase ‘clashes’ between managers and professionals (e.g. Exworthy & Halford, 1999; Farrell & Morris, 2003; Noordegraaf 2007), as managers tend to focus on efficiency and results, whereas professionals value autonomy, clients and quality. We hardly know, however, whether and to what extent this is happening, and whether subsequent conflicts are really widespread and worrisome. We have some empirical evidence that professionals might be able to cope with reforms (e.g. Ackroyd et al., 2007). We also have some indications that public managers might find ways to counter negative effects of managerial and governance movements (e.g. Gleeson and Shain, 1999). But empirically, it is unclear how managers themselves are affected by reform, how they experience changing relations, and how they ‘really’ relate to work floor professionals in the light of new relationships.

In this research paper, we will seek to understand how school leaders in Dutch secondary education respond to reform challenges, first and foremost by studying how they *relate to reforms*. We will study how their relations are affected – whether traditional relations, especially relations with teachers, change, what (new) relationships emerge, and which ‘relevant others’ make-up managerial worlds. We will do so by emphasizing the concept of *loyalty* (on the basis of e.g. Oglensky, 2008). In that way, we will not only show how new relations are ‘forced upon’ school managers, but also which ‘special’ relations, *normative* and *affective allegiances*, really count. We will particularly investigate whether school managers experience loyalty conflicts and how they cope with these conflicts. Empirically, we will focus on Dutch school leaders, not in the least because presumed clashes between school managers and teachers have generated political and public ‘movements’ that aim to ‘free’ the professionals (teachers) and ‘eliminate’ all management. As most school managers have been teachers, the question as to where their loyalties lie, is empirically critical.

Firstly, we will analyze managerial and governance reform tendencies in education. Secondly, we will discuss ways to study public managers as ‘critical agents’ and explore

relationships between managers and professionals as a matter of loyalties. Next, we will conceptualize loyalty. Then, we will present our research results on changing loyalties and loyalty conflicts. Finally, we draw conclusions about the role of managerial loyalties in forming reform responses and discuss consequences for (studying) reforms.

2. Managerial and governance reforms

Before we focus on school managers and their changing loyalties, we need to explore what reforms have been initiated in various countries in order to improve educational systems, and what sorts of new educational landscapes have come into existence. For reforms – also outside education – will affect the ‘webs’ of obligations and relations that make up managers’ work. As highlighted in the introduction, we distinguish between governance reform and managerial reform, although practically these phenomena reinforce each other.

Since the 1980s, relations between central governments and policy fields have started to be adapted, in most Western countries. In stead of a strong ‘government’ oriented policy grip on societal issues and service delivery, issues and services had to be ‘governed’ in more ‘horizontal’ and ‘interactive’ ways. Policy-making and service delivery in fields like policing, health care, education had to be produced by multi-party networks in which non-governmental actors would play important roles (see for general overviews Rhodes 1997; Kjær, 2004). In countries where organizations like schools had become entangled in government-based financial and policy regimes, they were granted autonomy to provide good education. Restructuring has enlarged decentralization, school autonomy and accountability (e.g. Mulford, 2003). Responsibilities concerning curriculum, personnel and budgets have been delegated and decision making powers have been transferred to school levels. Within schools, shared decision making is emphasized, as different stakeholders (teaching staff, parents) have been introduced in decision processes (Pont et al., 2008). Furthermore, school are expected to extend their ‘social tasks’, which means realizing broader social objectives via education, objectives like safety and social cohesion, moral development, citizenship, culture, sports and exercise (SCP, 2008). In order to adapt schools to these changing environments, schools were stimulated to enter into new partnerships with other organizations and to collaborate with other schools, agencies and communities, forming connections and networks, and sharing resources, in order to deliver more client-based educational services (see Hopkins and Higham, 2007; Pont et al., 2008).

At the same time, these new governance regimes had to be ‘managed’ well. Since the very same 1980s, public and non-profit sectors became the subject of managerial reform, whereby the so-called ‘new public management’ left its businesslike traces (e.g. Hood 1991; Ferlie et al. 2005). Policy organizations, police units and schools had to be run like a normal business, so that policies and public services would be efficient, customer-focused and accountable. In education, decentralisation and autonomy were combined with an emphasis on accountability for school outcomes and the performance of teachers and students. Autonomy and accountability were supposed to increase the ability of schools to respond more effectively to local needs, strengthen education and improve student performance (Pont et al., 2008).

In some ways this runs against governance movements, as new partnerships are difficult to align with organizational accountability. But in many ways both movements reinforce each other. The ‘distancing’ of links between governments and non-profit service providers like schools can be accepted more easily when schools are run well. Oversight and inspection, moreover, can also be improved, especially as governments set clear performance standards for public service delivery.

Irrespective of the exact evolution in different countries and its impact on actual service delivery, this double movement of ‘*managed governance*’ has not only resulted in expanded roles and intensified responsibilities of school leaders (Pont et al. 2008), it has also produced institutional effects. First and foremost, it has produced and reshaped positions. Executives and managers, for instance, have become prominent agents, as they are held responsible for quality criteria, financial soundness and transparency. School leaders are expected to take on administrative and managerial tasks, handle strategic resources, improve teacher quality, build coalitions with external partners, engage in quality management and public reporting processes (Townsend, 2007). Professionals have become more prominent as well, as they must provide high-quality services, but their positions have also become pressured, as helping one client is no longer seen as ‘high-quality service delivery’, especially as waiting lists and perceived maltreatment have become yardsticks for judging performance. Managed governance has altered the relational landscape, in the sense that these various agents must deal with other actors in order to meet expectations. When schools must account for their actions, Inspectorates become watchful, for instance, and when they must establish new network-type of partnerships, they must ‘scale-up’ service delivery and negotiate with other stakeholders around schools.

There is lots of empirical research on the effects of managed governance, especially when it comes to organizations and organizational functioning. Public management reforms, for example, are studied extensively, often cross-nationally, and it has shown how new organizational forms and performances hang together (e.g. Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004; Forbes and Lynn, 2005). There is also empirical research on effects at work floors. Professionals use certain defense mechanisms that enable them to counter outside interference, to buffer outside pressures and filter management reforms (Ackroyd et al., 2007). There is hardly any research on effects on managers, however, whilst we might expect that the *'impossibility'* of managerial work (cf. Hargrove and Glidewell, 1990) has increased. Non-profit managers like school leaders have become crucial for translating reforms and leading change, such as new approaches to teaching and learning, for bridging policy and practice, for coping with multiple and contradictory changes, for meeting work floor expectations, and for maintaining or seeking legitimacy (e.g. Leithwood, 2001; Firestone and Shipp, 2005). They have become 'key intermediaries' between classrooms, schools and their communities, and educational systems as a whole (Pont et al., 2008). In other words, school leaders have become at the centre of policy impulses and top-down demands from central regulations and standards, client and work floor demands from teachers and students, and partnership requirements and external expectations from parents and local community (e.g. Goldring and Greenfield, 2002; Ballet, 2007). This explains why it will be difficult to 'do good' and why public and political debates centres on public and non-profit managers. They have become 'critical agents' amidst reform movements (cf. Newman, 2005; Rhodes, 2007).

3. (Managerial) loyalties

In order to study these critical agents, different approaches can be taken. We could for example study managerial work in open and unbiased ways, in order to understand how individuals cope with impossible managerial jobs (Hargrove & Glidewell 1990; see for even more open investigations e.g.: Kaufman 1980; Rhodes et al. 2007). The question then is, what do managers actually do to cope with day to day work conditions? We could also study managerial work from the perspective of work mechanisms that make up performance. At street-levels, Lipksy (1980) for instance studied 'coping mechanisms' of street-level bureaucrats, in order to understand how work demands from above are connected to client needs from below and actual work conditions. The questions then would be, how do managers

cope with contradictory work demands? Another approach – the one taken here – would be to study how public and non-profit managers respond to reforms, and how they (might) reframe their work and work conditions, in order to seek meaningful positions and relations. In other words, in stead of studying their work as such, it might also be possible to study how public managers perceive their work and (re-)enact work relations. *The question then is, how do public managers respond to reforms, and how do they rework their work?*

In order to apply such a perspective, we need concepts that enable us to (a) position managers in-between contradictory forces, (b) focus on links or attachments to these forces, and (c) understand how managers experience these attachments, in order to understand how subsequent working behaviour is affected. Beneath we will use the concept of *loyalty*, as loyalty is about relations, affective and normative dimensions or meanings of relations, and possible conflicts between meaningful relations (Kleinig, 2008; Oglensky, 2008).

Loyalty

Loyalty is a well known research theme in public administration and organisational sciences. Loyalty to politics is at the heart of research on ministerial responsibility and relationships between ministers and officials. Here loyalty is about official hierarchy: civil servants are supposed to carry out orders from political superiors, even if they disagree personally (Bovens, 1998). Organisational science scholars mainly focus on how loyalty affects decisions on leaving or staying in organisations (based on Hirschman, 1970, for example). However, public administration and organisational sciences perspectives on loyalty hardly focus on *relationships* between (groups of) individuals. Therefore, our research builds upon loyalty research which shows that individuals are embedded in ‘webs of relationships’ (cf. Baxter et al., 1997; Oglensky, 2008).

Oglensky (2008: 423) defines loyalty as ‘a mode of attachment – a particular way of connecting – (...) through which desire and a sense of obligation to show allegiance and stand by one’s role partner grows out of and reinforces commitment and fosters relational continuity’. Loyalty always manifests itself in a specific context in which an individual relates to different parties (Fletcher, 1993). Although this is about ‘objects’ (individuals, groups, things), loyalty actually focuses on the association or *relationship* with the objects that are valued (Kleinig, 2008: 41; cf. Jeurissen, 1997). Because individuals relate to a number of parties, they can have a number of loyalties (e.g. Kleinig, 1996; 2007). However, it is reasonable that loyalty is based on exclusiveness (Souryal and McKay, 1996): loyalty concentrates on ‘key relationships and associations’, which bear intrinsic value as they are

considered as ‘special’ or ‘meaningful’ (Keller, 2007; Kleinig, 2008). Meaningful relationships do not arise suddenly, but gradually evolve over time as a result of previous experiences, as something one ‘grows into’ (cf. Ewin, 1992: 408; Fletcher, 1993; Jeurissen, 1997).

Oglsky’s definition shows that loyalty can manifest itself as an attitude as well as in behaviour (cf. Kleinig, 1996). Individuals with a loyal attitude are loyal towards someone or something, because they feel attached (cf. Hirschman, 1970). These feelings of attachment bear *affective* and/or *normative* meanings (cf. Oglsky, 2008). In an affective sense, loyalty requires emotional attachment and devotion; loyalty points to an instinctive bond with something or someone (e.g. Ewin, 1992; Jeurissen, 1997). Nevertheless, loyalty is not necessarily associated with affection. Loyalty can also follow from a sense of duty (Oglsky, 2008), for example when individuals feel obliged to compromise relational expectations, as they find themselves in a web of relational expectations (Jeurissen, 1997; cf. Pfeiffer, 1992). Consequently, individuals are loyal because it is the socially expected, right or appropriate reaction – in that case, loyalty has a normative meaning.

Conflicts, conduct and context

Affective and normative dimensions of relationships constitute feelings of loyalty. However, they can simultaneously arouse *loyalty conflicts* (Baxter et al., 1997; Oglsky, 2008). Individuals can feel ‘torn’ between wanting ‘to do well’ or ‘respecting understandings’ they felt they had established in their relationship on the one hand, and their anxiety about making choices that might be perceived as ‘breach’, ‘betrayal’ or ‘treason’ on the other hand (Oglsky, 2008: 432; cf. Fletcher, 1993). When individuals are confronted with incompatible expectations, the right thing to do (normative) is not always the same as the strategic thing to do, nor are these always compatible with what one feels inclined to do (affective) (Oglsky, 2008: 433).

Even though affective and normative relationships are considered as essential foundations for loyalty, different authors argue that loyalty manifests itself centrally through *conduct* (e.g. Kleinig, 1996; Keller, 2007; Oglsky, 2008). Affective and normative relationships ‘oblige’ individuals to act in relation to the object of loyalty in ways that can be expected to maintain or further the interests of that object (Kleinig, 2008: 50; cf. Baxter et al., 1997; Oglsky, 2008). Loyal behavior is expressed in perseverance in commitment to the object of loyalty or in the fulfillment of responsibilities towards that object, even though such perseverance will be costly or unfavorable (Kleinig, 1996: 72). Loyalty shows self-sacrifice

and tenacity, in situations in which personal interests, benefits or strategic ambitions would probably dictate a different course of action (Kleinig, 1996; 2008). ‘It bespeaks persistence, self-sacrifice, constancy, and steadfastness *when* self-interest, self-seeking, personal advantage, ambition, personal projects, and various other egoistic inclinations or considerations would counsel otherwise. If there is no cost there is no occasion for the exercise of loyalty’ (Kleinig, 2008: 41).

4. Research design

Our literature study of the concept of loyalty reveals three research themes: loyalty as an affective and/or normative attitude towards meaningful relationships; loyalty conflicts; and (dis)loyal behaviour. As these themes have hardly been subjected to empirical research so far, especially in the light of reforms, an explorative research design was chosen in order to study managerial perceptions of reform and managerial loyalties ‘from within’, studied by means of qualitative methodologies.

During March and April 2008, twenty-three school leaders in Dutch secondary education were interviewed. We conducted *individual* interviews with nine school leaders; fourteen school leaders have been interviewed in five *group* interviews. A small number of school leaders were selected by the Secondary Education Council (VO-Raad). The remaining school leaders were selected by means of the so-called ‘snowball method’ (Boeije, 2005). A senior policy advisor of the Secondary Education Council and three senior advisors of two Dutch consultancy firms for educational management opened up their networks of school leaders. Eventually, nineteen school leaders were willing to participate. In order to do justice to the diversity of perspectives at different management levels in schools and school boards in secondary education, we chose to select school leaders on the basis of their formal position in their school organizations. We have held interviews with section- and team heads, location directors, school heads, as well as school board members and chairmen of executive boards. All of the interviewed school leaders had a lot of experience in education; more than half of the respondents (61%) has been – or still is – teaching. In order to guarantee the representativeness of research results – i.e. generalizing to management processes (in stead of populations; cf. Yin 1989), we tried to stressed variety, although we also accounted for certain differences, most specifically distribution over school types (pre-vocational secondary

education (or VMBO), senior general secondary education (or HAVO) and pre-university education (or VWO)), as well as distribution over regions, see table 1.

Table 1: Overview of respondents

	Type of school			Region		Total
	VMBO	HAVO/ VWO	Combination VMBO- HAVO- VWO	City	Country	
Executives	-	-	7	2	5	7
School directors	-	7	4	5	6	11
Section and teamheads	1	1	3	1	4	5
Total	1	8	14	8	15	23

In order to compare statements of school leaders, we have chosen to interview school leaders by means of several interview topics that originated from our literature study, namely ‘reforms’ and ‘loyalty’, see table 2.

Table 2: Interview topics

Reforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Changes in leading schools ○ Changes in relationships with teachers and other stakeholders
Loyalty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Meaningful relationships with others ○ Dilemmas and tensions that school leaders may experience, involving loyalty and loyalty conflicts at stake ○ Loyal behaviour

All interviews have been digitally recorded and integrally transcribed. Statements of individual school leaders have been classified by using the interview topics. Furthermore, differences and similarities between interview statements have been analyzed. We tried to reconstruct patterns in interviews statements for each cluster. In the results section of this paper we include citations that express school leaders’ opinions. Interviewed school leaders and board members will be referred to as numbers varying from (r1) to (r23). Although we realize that responsibilities of (several types of) managers can differ, all interviewed school leaders will be referred to as ‘school leader’, for we do not aim to understand differences between different types of school leaders (in different schools and regions). We aim to

understand how they respond to reforms – what mechanisms influence manager-professional relations, and managerial behavior.

5. Research results

We will present the outcomes of our explorative study along the lines of the previous conceptual argument. First, we will explore whether and how school managers are affected by (governance and managerial) reform. Next, we will analyze their (changing) loyalties, loyalty conflict and coping behaviour.

5.1 Effects of reforms

Many school leaders experience profound changes in their *position* within school organisations. They have to lead schools ‘with much more issues on their plate’ (r12). In stead of ‘executing of policy rules from above’, schools have become ‘policy makers’ and ‘key players’. School leaders indicate that they are responsible for important aspects of school policies and for employer affairs which formerly were regulated by laws. School leaders’ positions have not only changed as a result of extended responsibilities and decision making powers. As a result of multiple ‘social tasks’ that are transferred to schools, school leaders feel forced to ‘reposition themselves towards complex issues from time to time’ (r23). School leaders frequently mention changes which affect teachers and their work, such as the introduction of social training for pupils, the obligation to realize 1040 teaching hours or extra support in order to reduce drop-out. *‘In our school there is a tendency to restrict the agenda. Simultaneously, however, we are the gateway through which wishes or pressures enter the school. We are expected to do something with it. We cannot say: ‘we do not do it’ or ‘we do not pay attention to it’. We have to define our position. And that position must be translated internally.’* (r22). In other words, school leaders are expected to make judgments about the nature and limits of reforms and whether reforms are legitimate (cf. Ballet, 2007).

Transformations in the position of school leaders have lead to changes in teacher-school leader relationships. *‘Certainly, it is new that school leaders are blamed for determining teaching periods, for example, while in former days the Ministry was blamed for it. Heavy demands are placed on school managers.’* (r4). Furthermore, fulfilling a so-called ‘social task’ leads to ‘strong internal resistance’ on the side of teachers, who are convinced that

safety and social cohesion, moral development, citizenship, culture, sports and exercise for instance are ‘not a task of schools’ (r22). Teachers blame school leaders for ‘taking sides with national politics’ (r17), while school leaders at the same time complain about government policies which ‘preserve societal images of ‘powerful educational managers’ (r16) and ‘do not fit school reality’ (r18).

School leaders juggle competing responsibilities and stakeholder expectations intensify. More than ever, school leaders at different management levels feel themselves ‘key figures in webs or relationships’ amidst many stakeholders in school environments. In order to illustrate their pivotal role and their feeling to ‘stand between parties’, school leaders make use of different *metaphors*. School heads tell about their ‘sandwich position’ (r3), in between school executives and their own school; they act as ‘heat shields’ (r13). Various lower level managers (such as section heads) argue they operate in the ‘firing line’ or ‘frontline’, ‘are standing in front of the troops’ (r16) or are in a split’ (r14). Because lower level managers participate in management teams or executive boards, they regularly have to translate policies to classrooms, policies which are not always welcomed by (former) colleagues in departments. As a result, they often ‘feel torn between’ management and teachers, attempting to equally ‘accommodate’ both management and teachers. Respondents indicate that they are ‘caught between two fires’, ‘are wearing two heads’, ‘stand at the crossroads’ between teachers, their schools, executive boards and school environments (r22).

In short, school leaders are placed in between reforms and appeals of educational change on the one hand, and teachers’ views within schools on the other hand. School leaders have to make a judgment *whether* external and internal demands can be aligned and *how* these two could eventually be balanced. At the same time, however, judgments are being made in a ‘relational playing field’, in which stakeholders have contradictory interests most of the time. In the next section we will show how managerial relations and loyalties – especially with respect to teachers – affect how school leaders see and deal with reforms.

5.2 School leaders’ loyalties

Affective and normative relations

During their daily work school leaders relate to various groups and persons to whom they would like to behave loyally. School leaders indicate that loyalty is ‘inherent’ in their work (r12) and that they have ‘to deal with several loyalties’ (r6), loyalties that ‘catch them in-between’ (r16). An analysis of the interviews shows that teachers, pupils and parents in

particular can be seen as the most ‘relevant others’ (cf. Ballet, 2007). Various school leaders state that they have a ‘feeling of loyalty’ towards these parties: ‘My strongest feelings of loyalty are towards these groups’ (r6). And: *‘I think my strongest loyalties are towards teachers and pupils. I spend most of my time with both groups’* (r3).

The natural character of loyalty might vary. When school leaders talk in an *affective* way about a party (teachers for example), they ‘feel attached’ to this party. It refers to a ‘sense of belonging to something or someone, and being loyal to it’ (r16), and to feelings of ‘devotion’ and ‘allegiance’ (r22). An affective orientation usually involves feelings of ‘warmth’, ‘appreciation’ and ‘pride’, with regard to the school organization and its personnel (r16) for example. One school leader indicates that he is ‘concerned about pupils and teachers’; another school leader argues he is ‘committed’ to the ‘ups and downs’ of those he is loyal to (r22). Some school leaders say they have a ‘special bond’ with teachers, sections or pupils. This bond originates from the times they were teachers themselves, or were part of sections (r8, r12).

Some school leaders speak about loyalty from a *normative* perspective on their relationship with other stakeholders. These school leaders are loyal because they feel an obligation or see it as a matter of principle. *‘School leaders should be loyal to the decision making group. If a member of an executive board disagrees with a majority of votes in the board, spreading the decision of the board shows loyalty’* (r17). Loyalty based on normative beliefs is not necessarily connected with positive or affective feelings. School leaders can be loyal without being committed. One of the school leaders expressed this feeling: *‘I know our board does good things for our school, so I think that must reasonably deal with it. I do not identify with our board, but I do feel loyal’* (r12). Opinions about the ‘right’ or ‘appropriate’ thing to do can sometimes collide with affective loyalty: *‘I am loyal to decisions the board made; sometimes this leads to a loyalty conflict with interests of schools and loyalty towards teachers.’* (r12).

Tensions and loyalty conflicts

It seems that the added value of reforms for teachers is an important criterion for assessing reform initiatives. School leaders want to do justice to teachers and pupils. When reforms affect this in a negative way, and harm affective and normative relations, it might result in conflicting loyalties. When they consider their work, school leaders particularly refer to loyalty in their descriptions of dilemmatic situations and conflicts. The feeling to be confronted with multiple loyalty claims increases pressures on school leaders, for example

when school leaders feel they have to meet contradictory expectations. For some school leaders these situations result in a feeling of ignoring relations and even ‘failing’ in relations with relevant others. Some school leaders interpret this feeling as ‘letting teachers down’ or ‘doing pupils wrong’. *‘Sometimes there are struggles between school managers who say ‘we just don’t do it’, while the executive board want it to happen. I also witness a struggle between politics and my own school. In these cases, I am wearing two hats: I do feel like a director, but I do also see the heavy demands being placed upon some teachers’* (r20). For some school leaders this is accompanied by negative feelings, such as ‘discomfort’, ‘friction’ or even ‘inner conflict’ (r8, r12). These negative feelings especially seem to occur when loyalty towards teachers is at stake. Some school leaders argue that it has become ‘more difficult to remain loyal to teachers than before’ (r15) and that their loyalty towards their school personnel ‘is pressurized’ (r4). Previously, school leaders could remain loyal to their colleagues, as they were ‘victims’ of the same, ‘failing’ government policies (r4). Nowadays, however, school leaders are expected to take decisions about reform initiatives and stand for it in their own organizations.

Interview fragments show how some school leaders experience reforms as a ‘burden’ whilst other see reforms as ‘opportunities’. Due to changed expectations, school leaders experience ‘difficulties’ and ‘loyalty conflicts’. Some school leaders state that some policy measures exert disproportionate pressure on schools and their teachers, which makes school leaders angry, because they feel their agendas are imposed by government, politics or society (r16). Individual school leaders can feel ‘torn’ between wanting ‘to do well’ for pupils and teachers or ‘respect understandings’ they felt they had established in their relationship with these parties on the one hand, and their anxiety about making choices about reforms that might be perceived as ‘breach’, ‘betrayal’ or ‘treason’ on the other hand. Some respondents face dilemmas, when they are confronted with external reform demands on the hand, and loyalty towards their teachers and school on the other hand. In order to illustrate this, one school leader (r6) mentioned the 1040 hours standard in Dutch secondary education: *‘[...] Government has chosen democratically. As an organization responsible for implementing policy, one might say ‘we accept these decisions’. At the same time, however, it has negative consequences, especially for my team. Parents and pupils hardly face negative consequences. It does bother me, because I am forced take measures which hinder professionals and their work. I feel very uncomfortable about it.’* Another school leader points at consequences of decentralization with regard to educational reforms, which would increase loyalty conflicts at lower management levels: *‘Sections and departments within our school have been made*

responsible for developing the Second Phase.¹ It was striking to witness dominant reactions in these sections such as ‘what are the frameworks to work with?’, ‘how do we have to realize it?’. At lower management levels, one is afraid of making choices colleagues could disagree with; they would like to pass the buck to someone else. This has to do with a loyalty conflict: ‘who am I to say something about other people’s subject? School managers should do this!’ (r4). This respondent also stated that he ‘usually tries to not to become involved in conflicts between teachers and section heads, because he does not want to abandon anybody’ (r4).

Nevertheless, other school leaders rather see reforms as ‘new opportunities’. In general, they try to connect their school and education with school environments and societal stakeholders. Because they personally believe that schools are necessitated to cooperate with other stakeholders in order to provide better services or because they feel obligated to take on societal commitments to develop children optimally, school leaders take initiatives to cooperate with Regional Training Centres, youth welfare work organizations, et cetera and to maintain constructive relations with these stakeholders (r16). Another example is provided by a school leader who considers horizontal accountability an ‘enormous possibility’ to reduce teacher shortages by making an appeal to the network of his school (r2)

Coping behaviour

Although this research does not study school leaders’ actual behaviour, interviews show that loyalty also involves ‘doing things’. For example, one of the interviewed school leaders (r16) argues that loyalty is about ‘serving’ and ‘taking the plunge’ when he is balancing interests. Another respondent argues that he ‘particularly takes interests of teachers and pupils into account’ in case of conflicts of interests, and ‘these interests carry more weight’ than the interests of other parties (r18). One of the interviewed school leaders states: ‘When I think of loyalty, I think my loyalty is primarily with teachers and pupils. Most time I deal with both groups. If something would happen which threatens one of these groups, I have a very strong feeling about it. When parents come with a very unjust complaint about a teacher, I feel I have to stand up for him or her’ (r3).

Some statements of school leaders clearly show perseverance in commitment to teachers. ‘Of course, there will always be small conflicts between parents and teachers, or between teachers and pupils, conflicts which necessitate taking sides. My loyalty is to be

¹ Second Phase (in Dutch: Tweede Fase) is an educational reform implemented in The Netherlands.

found in my desire to explain my decisions to teachers at any time (r13). Another school leader (r12) links loyalty to perseverance in the fulfilment of responsibilities towards the teachers in her school: *'I think my loyalty towards teachers is manifested in (...) in my association with them, and in the way teachers are being developed, complying with their requests, sympathizing with them. Teachers must be able to rely on me in all circumstances.'* Another school leader states: *'I am part of the school management team, so I have to keep an eye on the whole school. I cannot merely think for a sole section, not even for a group of sections. I have to weigh interests against each other very clearly. Some things demanded by a number of teachers are not possible, I admit. However, I think, and that's my loyalty towards teachers, it must be communicated well (r8).*

More importantly, interviews show how affective and normative allegiances enable or constrain reform responses. Some school leaders respond *'strategically'*, seeking and developing new allegiances. *'In principle my loyalty is towards the quality of education, which is of overriding importance to me. In order to reach this, schools leaders should play a game with the interests of teachers, executive board, and so on. By playing this game, our work is only becoming more interesting'* (r1). Some school leaders act *'offensively'* in order to seize opportunities, but also because they show fear for being *'punished'* by governmental authorities. *'I want to act according to political agreements. I do not want to maintain a negative relationship with Inspectorates, and receive fines. I do not deliberately cope with rules, which would be a wrong signal. It's not done.'* (r23). This opinion is confirmed by another school leader: *'As a school, we are working within statutory frameworks and agreements within school boards. One can say 'I don't give a damn', but that is not how things work'* (r11, cf. r4). A striking difference among school leaders can be witnessed in their interpretation of in their *'discretionary space'*. While some school leaders want take laws and policies literally, other school leaders act rather *'defensively'*, by refusing to commit themselves to reform initiatives beforehand, for instance, *'because we must await how societal and political demands will develop before taking action'* (r3). Others indicate they *'prioritize'* and *'do not agree with change beforehand'* (r2, r13, r15). *'We do the things which are the best option from the perspective of our local school community. Even if initiatives from government do not fit with our local believes, we will do it anyway. In case we cannot come to our own standards due to reforms, I do not want to bear responsibility for them'* (r2). An other school leader (r22) adds: *'Sometimes we do things which are on the verge of the law. However, when it good for pupils, it is all right with me'*.

Another group of school managers *resists* ‘strategic’ responses, because they either have too strong affective and/or normative allegiances with work floors or too weak affective and/or normative allegiances with new counterparts. These school leaders develop strategies to cope with reform without harming their meaningful relationship with teachers. By interpreting reforms in a ‘minimal’ way, school leaders adopt a strategic position by showing loyalty and willingness to teachers. They seek for a balance between reform initiative, feasibility, teachers’ interests and their own opinions (cf. Ballet, 2007). *‘When Parliament had started to get up on its high horse with regard to the 1040 hours standard, we looked for ways in which we could fulfil meet the standard bureaucratically and procedurally as well as how it could cause us the least inconvenience as possible. We have counted the time to walk to another classroom among lesson time and we have reduced time for meetings about student reports. With regard to loyalty, it is a ‘fifty-fifty’ solution, but with this apparent solution I still partially frustrate my team’* (r6). Another school leader agrees: *‘The chairman of our executive board ordered me to implement 1040 teaching hours, as he considered it as a political fact. I, however, did not consider it as a fact. At that moment, I could quite well image that parents were concerned about the increase of cancellations of lessons. The political call for more teaching hours induced me to say within my school ‘we have to do something’, but did not try to implement this policy proposal at the expense of everything’* (r13). Hence, several school leaders seem to develop strategies in which they filter reforms, selecting specific aspects of reforms. School leaders adapt reform demands and use specific aspects for the development of their own school. *‘With regard to laws which aim at guaranteeing the quality of education personnel², we have set up our own procedures for assessing the functioning of personnel. We have given a twist to the law, but we do also meet the minimal requirements’* (r15).

Finally, some school leaders (r22, r23) try to *balance* loyalty expectations from different stakeholders: *‘With an enormous increase of the number of lesson hours, I intended to accommodate the pressures of parents and society. (...) On the contrary, I do not put my personnel to the sword as I used to do. (...) Nowadays, I undo some things in any way. (...) Rather, I have the idea that I balance external as well as intern stakeholders simultaneously’* (r23). Partially, this has to do with legitimizing actions: *‘Sometimes, when I am faced with a loyalty dilemma, I try to find ways to legitimize my actions to all parties involved. For example, with regard to the 1040 teaching hours, we do our utmost best to meet the 1040*

² In Dutch: Wet Beroepen in het Onderwijs

hour standard, although it is already clear we will fail in some respect. We exemplify why we cannot make it, although we have the best intentions (r19).

6. Conclusion

During previous decades, school leaders in many countries have been forced to realize ‘managed governance’. They have more leeway to ‘govern’ their institutions, but also more obligations to manage their schools in efficient and accountable ways. In many respects, our research shows that these reforms have had comparable effects on school leaders’ self-reported work practices. They increasingly face new demands of policy makers and politics, new societal expectations, as well as new expectations on behalf of Inspectorates, parents and other stakeholders in school environments. Furthermore, due to their pivotal position in school organisations as ‘critical agents’, school leaders are supposed to present themselves as favoring reforms.

This study contributes to a more thorough understanding of how school leaders are affected by reform, how they experience changing relations, and how they ‘really’ relate to work floor professionals. In our research, we made attempts to conceptualize and understand reform responses as a matter of *loyalties*, because ‘managed governance’ is about changing managerial positions and shifting relationships, whilst loyalties are about meaningful relations with relevant others. Although similar effects of reforms can be witnessed, we have shown that reforms do not operate in a linear and automatic way: reforms are *mediated* by managers. Although this finding may be not surprising, this explorative study reveals that managerial loyalties form an important mediating factor in responding to and coping with reforms.

Firstly, reforms do not only affect relations between stakeholders in and around schools; relationships affect public management reforms. School leaders deal with reform amidst a variety of relational expectations. In particular, relationships with parents, pupils and teachers bear relevance and importance for school leaders. But more significantly, the nature and quality of their relationship with teachers is very important for school leaders. Most interviewed school leaders have developed and maintained a sense of loyalty toward teachers. Most school leaders feel that their relationships with teachers are at stake. School leaders want to ‘do justice’ to teachers in order to guarantee their well-being. Contrary to public opinion, managers are not driven away from or working against teachers and work floors; they try to stay close to educational practices.

Reforms, however, have different meanings for different school leaders. Loyalties differ and loyalty conflicts differ; school managers stay close to educational practices in different ways. Depending on affective and normative meaning of relations, some school experience reforms as a 'burden', whilst some see it as an 'opportunity'. The former are afraid of putting their relation with teachers at risk, whilst the latter are less afraid. In other words, school leaders are not simply 'subjected to' reforms, but *actively cope* with reforms, in order to maintain or(re) build meaningful relationships. New relations might be combined with more traditional meaningful allegiances. Consequently, school leaders might buffer reforms that they view as unbeneficial for teachers, pupils or educational processes, while they might implement reforms that are perceived to be valuable. How school leaders select and legitimizes reform based changes and whether they are able to develop and maintain *multiple* loyalties, seems to influence the nature of 'clashes' between managers and work floor professionals within school organizations. Clashes can be 'softened' when school leaders enact '*strategic spaces*' in and around their organizations, and find ways to legitimate their actions to multiple others.

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