

Leadership and Management Case-Study

Kimberley Mills (Senior Learning Technologist – Library and Learning Support)

1. Aims and Objectives

The aim of this case-study was to look at *“...how BU can support part-time line managers/leaders, what challenges they face, what challenges/benefits there are to their team, the organisation, as well as tips or resources for others who wish or need to go part-time”*.

As a part-time leader at BU for 4 years, having worked at the Uni in a previous leadership role full-time and in previous roles external to BU, I was interested in looking at how other leaders in the University (mainly in a Professional Service) who are part-time manage their time, the leadership of their team and whether the University could do more to support them. I was also interested in learning about the perceptions of staff *managed* by a part-time leader and whether there were any issues that needed to be addressed.

Several of the part-time ‘leaders’ interviewed in this case-study have made a transition from being well-established full-time members of staff for childcare, family care, work/life balance reasons and /or nearing retirement.

In addition, I have been approached by other members of BU staff regarding how I manage being a part-time leader and how to go about the process of negotiating a part-time role for similar reasons.

Therefore I felt the information sought from this case-study would be of benefit to a wide community at BU and is aligned to the visions and values of the University, i.e. within the Strategic enablers of ‘People’ theme and their subthemes:

- **Recruit, retain and recognise and develop a high performing workforce**
- **Engage and inspire staff to deliver an outstanding student experience and to fulfil their potential**
- **Be an excellent place to work**

2. Background information

As of July 2014, BU currently has **216 active line managers with 1 or more staff reporting to them**. These are split **115** female and **101** male.

Out of these line managers only **20** are part-time, ranging from **0.4** to **0.9**, or below **1 FTE**. The split is **16** female and **4** male.

Right to Request Flexible working

With an amendment to the “flexible working” policy which came into effect at the end of June 2014 (after 26 weeks of service), my case-study became even more relevant. I therefore consulted with HR on flexible working and opportunities for part-time staff and how transparent this information is to BU staff.

3. Methodology

Using a qualitative and discursive approach, a cross section of staff above (**6 female leaders and 2 male leaders who were willing to be involved**) were interviewed on a 1:1 face-to-face basis. Due to the numbers involved, their team members (**23 in total**) were emailed separately regarding their experiences of being managed by a part-time member of staff. Lastly for my own learning and leadership development, my team (**comprising of 3**) were asked similar questions.

Due to the sensitivity of the data, no names are used in this case-study and anonymity is retained.

4. Expectations

Identified Benefits

In terms of identified benefits, I wanted to see whether there were clear benefits for being a part-time leader both to the leader, the team and the wider University. From speaking with part-time leaders **the benefits for them, to their team and the University are:**

- *the flexibility from BU or their line manager where business allows it*
- *staff are willing to be flexible themselves where business requires it, i.e. Open Days and peak University times so they are happy to swap days, hours and/or work from home*
- *the ability to retain a work-life balance for child-care/health benefits*
- *the ability to balance commitments with their working day/week such as after school activities, caring for children/partner(s), collecting children from school*
- *the nursery on the BU doorstep has been hugely beneficial*
- *they are happier in their role, good to have a year out for reflection, they do not worry as much about work as before as priorities have changed*
- *they work harder/smarter or are more strategic with their working time/commitments*
- *they are conscientious within their working hours and have a good work ethic*
- *they are often empathetic to other part-time staff in their team especially where childcare is concerned*
- *can often make quicker decisions rather than a consultative approach (i.e. more meetings) which can take longer*
- *“two heads are sometimes better than one “(BU will probably get more out of 2xPT staff rather than 1 FT)*
- *they can empower their team in terms of development to give them a sense of responsibility and experience “being in their shoes”, therefore encouraging emerging leaders*
- *they often work outside and additionally for the University (sometimes in their own time)*

However, in turn, some **challenges for part-time leaders are:**

- *the move from full-time to part-time can be difficult to adjust to and transitioning staff would welcome more support from their line manager/HR*
- *it can take time to feel established and/or recognised in their role*
- *they feel they are doing a lower paid/skilled job*
- *they feel that ‘being part-time’ is used as an excuse for not being included in meetings etc.*
- *the scheduling of meetings to ensure that the whole team is together can be difficult*
- *they would rather read emails ‘outside of their working hours’ to limit stress levels on return to work*

- they feel there is a stigma surrounding the terminology of 'part-time'
- they sometimes miss out on the more social aspects at work (but understand the pay-offs for this) which are often used as opportunities for team building
- they feel it is important to consider whether the role is actually 'part-time' or that you are doing a 'full-time' role in fewer hours – something has to give and what is given up?
- it can be difficult to participate in staff development and training
- they are not always able to take up opportunities, i.e. working groups/input into strategy
- "Academic citizenship" and/or collegiate business is sometimes compromised
- attendance at external functions / "Meet and Greets" are not always possible
- travel to meetings/training or for University business often takes away working hours (i.e. two hours travel time to an hour's meeting and two hours return can be a whole day away from the office)
- they do have concern for other full-time staff and the potential pressure on them
- they feel they can't apply for posts because they are mainly full-time
- letting go is often difficult when you have to leave earlier in the day or week
- there is an expectation that when a member of staff is on leave the other half of the role/job share should be available yet if it was one member of staff, they would be "on leave"
- there is no real difference if you are part-time or full-time to move goals forward however day-to-day management issues can sometimes arise

Team engagement

Engagement regarding my part-time leadership was sought from my team during the **early part of the exercise** and also at **the end to gauge their opinions** as to how I could be a better leader to them in the future. Teams from other services in the University were also consulted and asked about the challenges and benefits to them (**see Appendix 1**). My team are fairly small and consist of 1 FTE, 1 x 0.5 and 1 x 0.4. Earlier comments from my team prior to embarking on the leadership course were related to my own self-confidence in my abilities.

"...have more self-belief – you're fantastic at what you're doing, use that as a catalyst to keep you motivated and keep remembering that; unfortunately I think part of your role has been compromised by the <school> support. And as helpful as you always are, I worry that your good nature has been taken advantage of there.

.... continue to believe in yourself more. I've noticed you seem a lot happier than say 6 months ago; so whatever you are doing to keep up that self-belief – keep doing it!"

Things you do well and I appreciate about your line management skills:

"You work in partnership with us, you empower us to use our own initiative and there is a feeling of trust – which is good for motivation and job satisfaction

Areas that could be improved for the team, but that have been forced out of your control; so it's not really a question of you improving but more of you trying to change the situation:

- Perhaps to push our team forward more, meaning to have more planned projects / shared tasks, so we have more of a team aim....

- I think if you could raise your own profile it would help to raise the team's moral, as our profile as a team would be raised to, and we could get involved with tasks that drive strategy rather than fire fighting or picking up scraps of work

... have more self-beliefBe positive and assertive..."

5. Unintended outcomes

Staff who I spoke to felt that my case-study and findings would be of great benefit to the University and were interested in learning how it would be taken forward. **Greater awareness of flexible working practices and the support and transparency for part-time leaders was apparent.** Other colleagues felt there is a perception (from anecdotal evidence) that staff “...*should be working beyond their hours anyway*” and “*there is no real 9-5 anymore*”. It was noted that staff find it easier to work anywhere and beyond working hours due to the increase in mobile capability and technology but not all staff have the technology to support them with this.

Line Management of staff

The number of staff **managed by a part-time leader was interesting as this ranged from 1 to 11** and this was not representative of the part-time hours worked; this is perhaps an area which could be looked at in terms of how many should a part-time leader ‘lead’ and what does this mean. One academic leader I spoke to did not directly “line manage” anyone yet had approximately 20 appraisals to do. Interestingly, this relates to whether leadership is linked to line managing staff and this is debatable.

Transition back to work from maternity leave (Full-time to Part-time with a year’s break)

One member of staff I spoke to did not have a good transition back to her role following maternity leave; she did not feel ‘looked after’ by the University and felt that the year out of her role was more of an “inconvenience to the business”. Negotiation to a part-time contract was difficult and felt this was a localised arrangement with little involvement from HR. It took her almost a year to accept and adjust to a new working situation and she felt like a “new” member of staff, after a substantial time working for the University.

Further discussions with other part-time members of staff (not just leaders) may be worth exploring as this may not reflect other good practice and local arrangements happening in the University.

Application for other leadership roles/vacancies within the University

Another interesting aspect which I learned was that **part-time staff/leaders can apply for full-time posts.**

I was informed by HR that “...*this is covered in the “Recruitment and Selection Employment Law Workshop” at the University and applications would be considered on a case by case basis.* In addition the issue of whether the post should be part-time/full-time etc. should be considered prior to seeking approval to recruit to the post.

This was something part-time leaders were not aware of as part of our discussions and some felt that progression in their role is more difficult than if they were full-time; this was mainly touched on by the female interviewees. This could be an area that BU could address and perhaps make more transparent. In particular leadership posts could be offered as part-time/job share to encourage application.

During the process of this case-study one senior role in the University was advertised as a job-share and this was successfully interviewed and recruited to. It will be interesting to revisit this role in due course, to see how the job share and leadership aspect is working effectively.

6. Reflections

From the start of the leadership programme in November, I was very conscious that not only was I participating in the leadership course but also seconded to another role in a school on a part-time basis. This ironically took me away from my team much of the time and therefore I was interested in the effect this had on them.

Comments from my own team were:

"I don't believe the concept of a manager exists and is defined by the hours they work. It's about the pastoral and practical support offered when the managers are here and if not physically present, then remotely via email or other exchanges"

I have no comments or suggestions to give as my manager is supportive to me and my colleagues. There may be the old well-worn argument of someone "not being here" in the physical sense to make decisions, but I understand the chain of command should go upwards so have nothing further to add or suggest really

I feel that those who choose to work part time could be more likely to be discriminated with meetings outside their working hours, which is more a bad reflection on others part for organising so poorly"

"I haven't faced any issues being managed by a part-time line manager – but that could be because we work the same days which I definitely find really useful for continuity purposes.

"From my own perspective of being part-time it's difficult to feel part of a team as information and situations move forward very rapidly and you feel that you are always playing catch-up and perhaps a step behind the full-time members of the team. I am always conscious that full-time team members might feel that they can't share their workload if colleagues aren't around. As a result this can lead to isolation and team members feeling overloaded or left out and not valued. So it is a difficult balance to strike. I think communication is the key to tackling this.

Communication from the team leader to pull members together but also communication from the team. If people are not happy with a situation they really need to say. It's essential that we have a forum to do this – so more team meetings / get together for quick coffee / catch up is important.

You are rarely off sick –I think having a better "work / life balance" helps this – and should be a plus for offering staff flexible working.

As we are doing - I think regular meetings and perhaps quick catch-ups over coffee and further transparency of projects / tasks within our team will help pull team members together. I think our team is under resourced and we need another more technical person, who is full time and who can share the technical work load to avoid a "single point of failure".

"I think that it very much depends on the nature of the work that is being done within the team. There have been times when I might attend meetings or make decisions that would have otherwise been dealt with by my line manager; I don't necessarily regard this as an issue though.

"I do find that my work is generally quite independent therefore making me less reliant on a line manager being available throughout the week in order to complete business as usual tasks

Occasionally I'll pick up work that requires immediate action that had originated with my line manager although the same goes for any other PT member of the team, and again, the same for them when I am out of the office.

I think the goal for any manager is to run a self-sufficient team, which does go doubly so for a PT manager due to the reduced contact time. Certainly working in the same office is an advantage which helps reduce the need for additional 'catch-up' meetings and keeps work more fluent.

I think we have a good dynamic within our team and am aware that steps that are being made to help balance workloads in order to support the flexible working patterns of our team members.

For our work I don't really see that the line manager role would be any different whether PT or FT.

Due to the 'support' element within our work I think the key is to minimise any involvement in reactive work that could potentially demand an urgent response at any time of the week.

More focus on long-term strategic objectives and projects. That said I appreciate there has been certain factors which have obstructed this line of work which have been unavoidable"

7. Measures of success

I think the fact that there are successful part-time leaders (albeit a few) in the University from the comments made by their own staff is in itself a good testament.

Part-time leaders appear to be managing their work-life balance well and feel on the whole the University is supportive of their working practices.

From speaking to staff it just seems apparent that there needs to be **more transparency and advocacy of part-time leadership roles and flexibility** within the University by Senior Management.

8. Lessons learned

Personal

From participating in the leadership programme and developing this case study, I feel that several lessons have been learnt and are mainly regarding my own perceptions:

- *not all part-time 'leaders' at BU feel guilty for not working a full-week and I should be comforted by this*
- *staff can and are very capable of leading a team on a part-time basis*
- *taking time out to talk to colleagues (not just within your team) across the University is extremely valuable and something we do not always get the time or luxury to do*
- *part-time leadership is not about 'not being seen', it's about empowering and motivating your team to feel confident in their own abilities*

- *to be more confident in my own role and leadership style but aim to develop myself even further for the benefit of myself and my team*
- *Communication is the key to ensuring a happy, motivated team but that needs to work both ways*
- *The need to ensure and facilitate the team are sharing knowledge more, i.e. working together on projects, ensuring there are no single points of failure*

For the team (s)

- *Staff often feel empowered when their leader is not “at work”. They felt they could make decisions or know who else to turn to if their line manager was not available.*
- *It gives teams an opportunity to “step up” when their line manager is not available.*

For the wider University Community

- *Useful for BU and inspiring leaders to consider offering roles as part-time opportunities/job shares*
- *more transparency of resources and support for part-time leaders (i.e. promotion of “flexible working” by Senior Management and better support for return workers or nearing retirement)*
- *Line Managers should review job descriptions if a staff member is transitioning to a part-time role to see whether the work is acceptable to days/hours worked*
- *Staff are a happier workforce if the stress of work does not impact on them as much, i.e. the importance of reinforcing a ‘work-life balance’ to your team*
- *Helps retain good, knowledgeable staff if flexibility is provided on both parts*
- *Is used as a motivational reward or incentive to recruit, retain, recognise and develop a high performing workforce*

9. Tips for Part-time leaders

Do:	Don't:
- Keep in touch with your team	Abdicate!
- Trust your team and colleagues Make staff think for themselves/signpost but don't become a security blanket for your team Get them to 'act in your shoes'	Micro-manage or be too controlling
- Get to know your staff, find out what their learning styles/motivations are - Take time out to spend time with your staff, not just work related	
- Communicate as much as possible - Reassure your team that you can be contacted in emergencies or provide an alternative as to who else they can turn to for advice	
- Be clear as to when you will be reading/acting on emails - Do read emails if it helps relieve personal stress levels - Take advantage of email management courses (staff development) and strategies	However don't feel pressurised to reply to emails on your non-working days – your team don't expect you to.
- Keep your Outlook Calendar open and be clear as to when you are/are not working, clear hours/days visibility / block out hours - Use of out of office messages and voice mail appropriately	
If sharing a mailbox, use colour coding in MS Outlook for "actions" / "info only"	
Be clear as to when colleagues should expect a response if not immediate	
Be as flexible as you can <i>within</i> your working week/days	
Be strict with your time but flexible where possible	- Work outside your contracted hours
Work smarter, not harder	- Try and do everything you did before in the same time – there has to be a compromise from <i>both</i> perspectives (i.e. less meetings/less teaching etc.)
Give staff the opportunities to trial flexible working where business allows and evaluate it	
Review Job descriptions to ensure nature of work reflects part-time hours	

10. Current resources from HR

In relation to part-time and flexible working, there are a number of resources for staff available from the **BU Staff Intranet** and there are also some excellent resources within the '**Leadership & Management Toolkit**':

Work-life Balance

Bournemouth University states within the "[Stress Management Policy and Code of Practice](#)":

*Getting the work-life balance right is high on the agenda for many staff who have personal responsibilities and interests, as well as work commitments. **Giving staff more flexible options means that they should be able to get more out of their personal life, whilst giving the most to their working life.***

Progress has already been made by establishing family-friendly policies (these may all be found in the Staff Handbook) including:

- *Maternity leave*
- *Paternity leave*
- *Parental leave*
- *Adoption leave*
- *Family & Domestic Emergencies*
- *Career Break Scheme*
- *Right to Apply for Flexible working*
- *Well Being at Work*

As well as looking at Bournemouth University's policy on "Flexible Working" and the transparency of such information, it may be worth taking this study further and reviewing other University Policies/Practices, e.g. Sheffield University; <http://www.shef.ac.uk/hr/equality/policies-index> and also local employers to see what they provide.

Leadership and Management Toolkit Resources

From participating in the Leadership programme, there are some excellent resources as part of the Leadership Toolkit, those being:

- [Flexible Working Arrangements](#)
- [My Attitude towards Work-Life Balance](#)
- [The Changing Face of Work-Life Balance](#)
- [How to Support Women Returners](#)

Other Resources

**Right to Request Flexible Working – the ACAS Guide
Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS)**

<http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/1/a/The-right-to-request-flexible-working-the-Acas-guide.pdf>

11. Conclusions and Next Steps

This case study does not intend to cover all aspects of part-time leadership nor does it touch directly on all areas of leadership (part-time or otherwise) but there are definite areas within the field of “part-time leadership” linked to ‘well-being’ and ‘transition’ and ‘career progression’ which BU can support staff on as highlighted above.

Further to this case-study it would be interesting to hear the views on part-time leadership from senior/executive staff members within the University. Further endorsement from the University Executive relating to wellbeing and flexible working practices would be welcomed by part-time staff.

As part of the findings above, input into the “working at BU/New to BU” section on the Staff Intranet would be of benefit and this is an area which I would be willing to work with HR/Staff Development on as a result of this case-study.

And finally there are always areas of improvement in terms of my own leadership style, which from working with my team, I can hopefully develop and enhance on in the future.

Kimberley Mills
September 2014

Acknowledgement(s):

Thank you to all those who have been involved in this case study, including my own team, Staff Development and HR for their input and to my mentor (Barbara Montagna) for her continued encouragement and support.

Appendix 1: Anonymised Comments from BU staff managed by a Part-Time Leader

Challenge:

*"I suppose I would see the biggest challenge/issue being when a situation arises when (A) isn't around where we would normally seek her input. A lot of the time **it gives the team the opportunity to source our own solution/come to our own conclusions as to the correct path to take – something that might be out of our comfort zones but that we are capable of. For me this increases confidence to make some decisions that (A) wouldn't necessarily need to be bothered with, relying less on her as a 'safety net' even when she is about and creating less distractions for her.***

Occasionally if (A's) not around we will need to ask the 'next level' for their opinion if we really don't know what the correct response/approach is – they are both easy for us to approach/speak with so never a problem for us."

Challenge:

*"Senior managers come to us directly anyway, but when our manager is out of the office this can be a particular issue. Work sometimes doesn't cascade to us in the way it should. This is accentuated when we get work given to us that needs to be done on a very tight timeline. So could be 'we need this done now' and **our manager isn't there to sense check, give us her perspective.** I think this is about the particular circumstances of our team, and there is nothing that our manager can do about this."*

Advantage

*"If someone in my position aspired to management then it might be useful having a part-time manager as **it would give them an opportunity to practise management skills in her absence.** Personally, I prefer to be in the role of 'specialist' rather than managing others, so for me it is an additional responsibility informally supervising others. I don't hate it, and I'm happy to do it, but if it was my choice I'd prefer not to"*

Appendix 1: Anonymised Comments from BU staff managed by a Part-Time Leader

*"My Line Manager is always here during core hours and generally leaves around 4pm. I don't really face many issues apart from sometimes when we get an emergency with a student after 4pm (this is rare) **it means I have to think and decide for myself which is actually probably quite a good thing...."***

"BU can support by readily agreeing to staff working at home sometimes where feasible and if extra hours are needed to meet a deadline.

Being part time can impact on others, for example if a manager is absent when something urgent needs okaying or something goes wrong it needs to be clear what action the staff present should take, i.e. who else to go to and/or a manager might have agreed they would be happy to pick up emails/calls from home.

Flexibility is required, an employee's role may be particularly pressurised at times, especially if the role has been condensed from a full time one, into a part time one.

Draw backs could be that expectation is high that hours are rearranged when meetings or training for example is scheduled.

You might miss things when not there, not all colleagues remember to update you on what missed, so some good practice amongst colleagues such as having an allocated 'buddy' would be good.

Depending on the individual and what type of person they are – some are more organised than others – you need to be organised and look ahead/plan accordingly.

Working the hours you want means you are (hopefully) particularly switched on when you do come to work and are focussed.

It could be quite a positive day if a part time manager is not there – enabling staff to knuckle down with the job at hand, without interruption, meetings or ad-hoc requirements/demands"

Appendix 1: Anonymised Comments from BU staff managed by a Part-Time Leader

Benefit:

*"We have a brilliant manager, very calm under pressure, supportive, and insightful. I think the fact that we miss her so much when she's gone is a testament to how good she is. I suppose that the fact that **she has a greater work life balance than she would being full-time improves her wellbeing, and therefore means she is more pleasant to be around than she otherwise would be**, but it's very hard to tell as I have never worked with her in another way. **I do think that part-time working is really important for wellbeing, and that it should be something that should be more common.**"*

Challenge:

*"Not being sure when (...) will be in or not; **would be helpful to have definitive days/times marked on the calendar each week.***

Trying not to email (...) as (...) often looks at emails when they are off and I don't want them to work on those days... "

Benefit:

*"For me I often just make decisions because (...) isn't available to ask so have probably taken **on more responsibility than if they were here all the time.** (...) is flexible with their time off and will often swap days to be at meetings etc., **it would be easier if it was always fixed days/times.** Generally it works well, but would benefit from the calendar being kept up to date with days/times working."*

Challenge:

*"It can be difficult when a decision needs to be made and they are not in the office. You don't want to phone them at home **so I usually go ahead and make a decision.** This can be guess work or going with past experience. It does go the other way though and **you can usually get more things done without their approval and then when they are back in the office it is too late for them to do anything about it.**"*