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**EMT ASSIGNMENT**

**Expectations, desires and reality: the use of staff interviews to develop a new coordinator role in a private language school**

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## Contents:

Introduction .....	1
Background .....	1
Interviews .....	2
Analysis .....	4
Defining the role .....	10
Job Description .....	12
Appraisal .....	13
Management of change .....	14
Benefits for the organisation .....	15
References .....	15
Appendices:	
1 .....	17
2 .....	18
3 .....	19
4 .....	20
5a .....	21
5b .....	22
6a .....	24
6b .....	25
7a .....	27
7b .....	28

# Expectations, desires and reality: the use of staff interviews to develop a new coordinator role in a private language school

## Introduction

This paper examines the organisation of a small language school, in particular with regard to a newly established post of coordinator. Interviews were conducted with principle stakeholders with different perspectives – the school director, an experienced coordinator and a teacher working with the new coordinator on the subject of coordination in the school. These interviews were then analysed in order to develop the new coordinator role. A consideration of important points of the role of the academic manager is then related to the school. These points are then tied together to produce a job description for the new post. Appraisal of the new post, and of the whole school is then looked at, followed by a discussion of how to manage the changes suggested. The paper concludes by looking at the benefits for the organisation of the new post.

## Background

The school was founded in 1992, in the north of Italy, specialising in young learners. When the school was founded there was only one full time teacher (the owner) and two part time. The school has gradually grown over the years, and now has a staff of fourteen, consisting of nine full time teachers, two teachers/secretaries, two part time/occasional teachers and one secretary/cleaner.

The school offers three main types of courses:

- inside courses - inside the school with two to six students, leading to the Cambridge ESOL exams - Starters, up to CAE
- outside courses - in local mainstream schools, from nursery schools up to high schools, sending mother tongue teachers to work with local teachers providing spoken English lessons. These courses last from ten weeks, up to the whole school year of thirty weeks.
- individual courses for both young learners and adults.

The school has grown to be the market leader in its town for young learners, but the growth of the school has lead to several organisational challenges, one of which will be discussed here. As the

director felt that it was no longer possible for him to do everything he formed an advisory committee to help with strategic planning, resembling Mintzberg's (1993) strategic apex, and appointed coordinators to look after quality management of various age groups of students. Many of the school's students have grown up attending the school, so after the thirteen years that the school has been running, children who started at the age of five are now eighteen. This has caused an expansion of the number of courses over the years as this first intake has progressed through the school with now approximately the same number of courses at each age group. This has meant that the high school courses, leading to the PET and FCE exams, have recently expanded, so a new coordinator was needed to help organise these courses. This new post has recently been appointed, but has no job description, or definition. This has led to the organisation represented by the chart in appendix 1. This chart was created by the author, and refined throughout the course of this project as his understanding of the organisation developed. No organigram existed previously for the organisation, which is representative of a lack of consideration of the global structure of the organisation, even from senior management, who instead concentrate on the day to day running of the business and the individual aspects inside the organisation as opposed to the whole. This is often found in small businesses, as exemplified by Evans (2005).

## **Interviews**

The aim of this paper is to use interviews of various stakeholders to help develop a deeper understanding of the organisation, to be able to develop the role of the new coordinator.

Three interviewees were chosen as being main stakeholders:

- the director, as he appointed the post, and owns the organisation.
- an established coordinator, as she has worked for the school for many years, so understands the organisation well, and also understands the role of coordinator.
- a teacher working with the new coordinator, as the development of the role will directly affect her job.

Semi-structured interviews (Burman, 1994:50) were chosen as the research method, so as to allow the interviewees to express themselves freely on the issues raised in the interview, but also to give enough structure for the data to be useful and comparable.

All the interviewees were asked if they were prepared to take part in the research, and informed that the interview would be recorded but that if they were not happy with anything that the recording could be stopped and erased and that they should feel free to stop the interview at any point. They were also offered the possibility to read the finished paper, if they wished.

Three lists of questions were written to serve as a guide for the interviewer (Appendices 2-4), with similar questions to allow comparison, but not identical, to understand the different perspectives of the participants.

#### *The director*

The interview with the director (D) was in two stages - firstly to gain a greater understanding of the organisation, including its history, and secondly to examine the organisation in the light of the new coordinator role. The first point to note about this interview is that the director seemed to enjoy talking about the history of the school, talking for 10 minutes on the subject in a 30 minute interview with an average length of turn of 3 minutes 30 seconds when talking about the history of the school. This shows the danger of going off subject, not leaving enough time for other points more important for this research as the history was intended to be background information. Only 5 minutes was spent talking directly about coordinators. This is a point which was taken into consideration for the subsequent interviews, to focus primarily on the core area.

#### *The established coordinator*

C has worked for the school since it was set up and has been a coordinator since the role was established. She reported feeling nervous about the interview and asked to see the questions beforehand to help her answer, which was done.

### *The teacher working with the new coordinator*

During the preparation of the interview, but before the interview took place this teacher announced her leaving the school, to return to the UK. Thus this interview also has some characteristics of an exit interview, where the interviewee may feel more free to talk about problems in the organisation.

### **Analysis**

In order to analysis these interviews, summaries were made of the interviews to isolate key points, which were highlighted, and then key points form the recordings were transcribed (see appendices 5-7). These transcriptions were compared to find points of agreement and disagreement. These points are then used to help define the role of the new coordinator.

### *Comparative analysis of the interviews*

#### *Quality of teaching*

For D and C the quality of the teaching is one of the key factors in the success of the school.

Here referring to the history of the school:

D: "...the school grew because we were offering quality language teaching to children..."

C: "I think it's been successful, down to, hopefully the high standard of teaching."

And here to the present needs:

D: "The quality has to be there, because this school is based on quality teaching."

It is interesting to note that this is not mentioned by T. Both D and C understand the historical importance of quality teaching. T on the other hand comes from the point of view of someone doing

their day to day job, without thinking of the competitive edge, to produce a delighted customer. This emphasis on quality could be transmitted from senior management to teachers by the coordinators, making the coordinators responsible for quality.

This idea is reflected by C when talking about new teachers:

“As I see my role it’s to help new teachers with material, with ideas, to give back-up, for teacher training”

Although at the moment, this seems to be more for preventing bad work, rather than producing high quality. This is seen in C’s comment:

“The idea at the moment is that we’re there for helping teachers with specific age group related problems for teaching.”

Here talking about resolving problems. Transforming this acceptable quality into high quality in the school has come about in the past because of the people, as D comments:

“We’ve been lucky enough to get the right people.”

Which T agrees with:

“...[D]’s quite lucky to have some of the people he’s got working there who care about things as much as they do...”

This “luck” combined with a lack of serious competition, as expressed by C:

“There’s not very much competition for kids,”

combine to make the school the market leader for young learners in the town. In an increasingly competitive market, however, there is a need to ensure that the quality is guaranteed. This will be increasingly difficult as the school grows, as D observes:

“The school is expanding...and now with fourteen teachers it’s not so easy to guarantee quality teaching and it’s, I don’t want this school to become too management orientated. I think it would lose it’s nice little family school atmosphere.”

This emphasis on quality could come from the coordinators. D’s warning about losing the family atmosphere leads us to the next point - care.

### *The school philosophy - care*

Part of the reason for the school's success is the caring philosophy, which combines with T's previous point about the right people.

D concurs:

"I think one of our successes is that we really care about young children."

This is reflected by C's comment:

"The child comes first is D's philosophy. I think that that's true."

T finds this in the atmosphere of the school:

"I like the fact that it's the concentration on the family atmosphere."

D sees it as an important part of coordinating (I = interviewer):

D: "There is a certain ethic I would like to give to co-ordinating."

I: "What would you say that ethic is?"

D: "That ethic is to care...care and concern...I see that in coordinator's jobs as well."

Thus the coordinators should transmit the 'care' ethic to the teachers to maintain the family atmosphere in the school as it grows.

### *Delegation*

As the school grows, there is more of a need for delegation. The introduction of coordinators is a reflection of this, as D says:

"It's a problem of time. I don't have time to help teachers plan their lessons."

And

"While I am directly involved in the specialist teaching, the need for a coordinator isn't really there."

As D is now involved a lot less directly in the teaching, and doesn't have the time to help teachers with planning, the role of coordinator *is* needed.

D recognises the importance of delegating, saying:

“Delegating is fundamental. I have done that. So as I say, although perhaps my character tends to be yes I’d like to control everything that goes on, because it’s my school, it’s my second family... But you must delegate.”

Although he recognises that he finds it hard. This is also seen by C, but in more negative terms:

“I think D finds it difficult to delegate.”

And

“D is trying to take on too much.”

This is a reflection of one of the biggest management problems in the school - D being too busy. This was noted by all three interviewees:

T: “The weak points. I think that the organisation is quite poor. I think that D should be more available.”

C: “Weak points...communication between D and teachers, there’s sometimes a breakdown in communication there because D is so busy.”

D: “I don’t have enough time, and that is a management problem. I think I should be following teachers more closely. The contact with most teachers is fine because we see each other almost every day. It might just be ‘hi, how are things?’ but we do see each other, the contact’s there, but not with all the teachers some teachers who don’t work here, there’s not much contact with them”

And D again:

“I want everyone in the school to do things my way. Probably not having enough time is also positive in the sense that I therefore delegate, I let people do their own thing. If I had more time perhaps I wouldn’t.”

Here D sees this lack of time as having positive aspects, although as C and T observe, this is a weak point. D makes the point that his lack of time makes him delegate, but it could be more positive to delegate more, for example delegating routine tasks, to give him more time. Coordinators could help by taking on some of the tasks currently carried out by D, related to their courses, for example dealing directly with the office with regards to exam enrolments, and course timetabling at the start of the year,

without going through D. This would require training and experience for the coordinators. This would also help with the communication problems noted by C and T above, by making D more available.

### *New teachers*

Many comments were made by C and T on the subject of new teachers in the school:

C: "I think it would be a positive thing to be a bit more present, particularly with new teachers, to check they are planning their lessons properly, and to watch some of the lessons that they actually teach."

C: "For new teachers I think probably a little more structure is needed, and that's why we've recently come up with the idea of coordinators for different age groups. I think that for new teachers that they do need to know that there is a particular person that they can go to talk about specific problems for specific age groups."

C: "I think the school can appear to new teachers and parents as being badly organised and unprofessional."

C: "The season starts September October, everybody gets immediately busy, sorting out courses, getting courses off the ground, it's a very busy period and that is probably the period when new teachers need the most help, and it happens to coincide with the busiest time for D and all the coordinators."

C: "I see it [coordinating] very much as helping out new teachers, teacher training."

All of T's comments are about her experiences when she first started at the school:

T: "I probably needed, before I started teaching here, for example, more indications for how to behave."

T: “I think that somebody when they first come in, so that they appear more professional ...I think that they should be given more advice on things like these.” (on discipline)

T: “I did feel a little bit lost last year.”

The comments from T show the need to help and guide new teachers, particularly if they have no experience with young learners. C’s remark about the reason for coordinators shows that this is the intention, although it is not yet working in practice. One reason for this could be C’s comment about the coordinators being too busy at the start of the year.

### *Coordinators*

C tells us that her role as a coordinator is still undefined, but she has ideas:

“The role of coordinator, we are still trying to sort that one out because it is new for us. As I see my role it’s to help new teachers with material, with ideas, to give back-up, for teacher training, to give moral support as well. Yes, that will help ease the pressure off D.”

Here she also notes the beneficial effect that coordinating should have on D, which should then filter down to the other staff, and also leave D more time to concentrate on strategic management.

C highlights the main challenge in coordinating – time:

“Finding time ... It doesn’t always fit in with other people’s timetables.”

T also has some ideas for coordination:

T: “I think there should be some kind of standardisation between courses.”

T: “I think that guidelines need to be created for the secondary school courses”

T: “Maybe some kind of sharing of materials and sharing of ideas.”

T's ideas are a little different from C's, in that C is reactionary – providing help when needed, whereas T's ideas are more proactive, requiring extra work from the coordinators which may be difficult to motivate given the time constraints mentioned by C. If these measures were taken, however, it could be easier for new teachers to be trained and feel less “lost” than T was.

### **Summery of analysis**

- Quality is vital for the school. This needs to be transmitted by the coordinators.
- The culture of the school is caring, both for students and staff. This too needs to be transmitted by coordinators.
- One of the school's weak points is D's lack of time. More delegation is needed to help.
- New teachers need help to fit in to the school culture and with practical teaching issues.
- Coordinators should provide training and support for teaching and discipline problems.
- One of the problems with coordinating is a lack of time, especially at the start of the year.

### **Defining the role**

Pugsley (1992) gives us an interesting definition of the role of the ‘academic manager’, which fits in with many of the points made in the interviews. She summarises the role as:

- responsibility for the establishment and monitoring of sound teaching and learning programmes;
- the proper selection and use of materials and hardware;
- the in-service monitoring and development of staff.

Considering Pugsley's first point, given that the post under consideration is coordinator for exam courses it follows that these programmes should include ensuring that teachers are familiar with the exams, and are helping students with exam preparation, concentrating on difficult areas.

One measure already in place is the coordination of mock exams to ensure that all teachers are conducting the same mock exam at the same time. This allows for comparison between courses to

identify needs for particular groups, in particular exam areas, but it can also be extended to identify training needs for teachers, if there are consistent weaknesses in certain areas, which can be addressed in teacher training sessions, specific to the exam.

Pugsley's second point is being followed, in that course books have been selected for all of the courses, rather than leaving planning and material choice totally to teachers. There is a danger that this standardisation will discourage teacher creativity, so careful selection of material, following Sheldon's (1989) checklist for course book selection, along with teacher training to ensure that teachers are equipped to follow the basic material, but to select other material when necessary. This fits in with Pugsley's third point. Along with training, observation is another underused tool for teacher development.

D mentions that he would like to observe teachers, but does not have time. This could be performed by the coordinators, to supervise teachers, although this often has negative effects, as Sheal (1989) notes. He suggests that teachers themselves take part in observation. This would then help to reduce the judgemental aspect of observation, and become a powerful tool for staff development. This is, however, time consuming and either staff are paid, which becomes prohibitively expensive, or staff use their free time. In a school where the staff 'care' this could be possible, but would have to be administered with tact, perhaps asking teachers to volunteer, and to observe one other teacher and the same teacher observe him/her, to reduce the stress of being observed by D, or the coordinator. This programme could be administered by the coordinator.

Standardisation becomes more important as the school grows, to ensure quality. In this sense coordinators become a sort of "technostructure" (Mintzberg, 1993:15). Coordinators do the following to certain aspects of the work of teachers: "design it, plan it, change it [and] train people", although in a small organisation the coordinators are also teachers, so they are not removed from their own decisions. These aspects include material choice, curriculum design, monitoring staff to ensure quality and teacher training.

Reasor (1986) warns of the danger of the administrator becoming separated from staff, focusing on rules and procedures. This is an important consideration in a school where the family atmosphere is important, but possibly under threat as the school grows. The coordinators must avoid becoming administrators, continuing to provide help and support to the teachers.

## **Job Description**

These points can now be combined to help write a job description. Gan and Kleiner (2005) tell us:

“The key to writing an effective job description is to first identify the essential functions of the position.”

An anonymous author (2003) adds that the requirements in the description should actually say what the post holder will do, which may seem obvious, but is very often lacking. Gan and Kleiner also talk about the importance of identifying the necessary skills for the job.

Distilling all of the points from the interviews and literature into a few short phrases produces the following job description:

Coordinate PET and FCE courses to ensure quality teaching in the following way:

- Provide support for new teachers
- Conduct periodic teacher training sessions
- Select course material
- Coordinate mock exams
- Encourage and monitor staff development
- Deal with any other course/didactic problems

Skills required:

- Interpersonal – be able to help teachers who may be under stress
- Organisational – to coordinate courses, staff and training programmes
- Flexible – to deal with unforeseen problems
- Knowledge of the PET and FCE exams

The fifth point about staff development could include setting up an observation programme. The sixth point builds in flexibility to the post, in line with Gan and Kleiner (2005:52). This could arise if, for example, an inexperienced teacher finds, ten minutes before the lesson that there are no CD players available when she has a listening lesson planned and needs help to re-plan last minute.

## **Appraisal**

As well as helping define the new post, job descriptions are a valuable tool for appraisal. This is particularly important for a new post, to judge whether or not the post itself has been and will continue to be valuable for the organisation and also evaluate the performance of the post holder. In many small businesses formal appraisal is not seen as necessary as the owner-manager knows the staff well. This is seen even more with middle management, as the owner-manager works very closely with the middle manager (Kotey and Sheridan, 2004:481). Formalising the process a little more would bring the benefit of a concrete comparison between the purpose of the job and the day to day practice. The job description could be used for this in an interview with the director on a yearly basis, combined with a 360° appraisal method getting the opinions of the teachers working with the coordinator. In reality, given that all the coordinators work closely with the director, and the director's main problem is one of time, appraisal of coordinators is likely to become a series of informal conversations with the director, and an informal "is there anything that we can organise better?" to the teachers from time to time. These can, however, be very valuable in the organic development of the post, if the points made in these conversations are applied.

A formal appraisal system does not exist in the school. This could in the future be set up and ran by the coordinators, possibly in conjunction with teacher observation. Given the caring/family culture of the school this could be seen as positive by staff, but tact would need to be used in order not to upset experienced teachers, and to distract from the staff development aspects of any observation programme.

## **Management of change**

The introduction of the new post is a positive way to manage the growth of the organisation, however the introduction of any new post and changes to that post need to be managed carefully in order to avoid problems. Benton (2001) warns of the dangers of poorly managed change – confusion, dissatisfaction, and low morale. The new post must be developed in a way to avoid these problems both for the post holder and for teachers working with the coordinator. Benton suggests a strategy called CARE:

- Clear direction and support
- Adequate and appropriate training
- Recognition and reward
- Empathy

This fits with the school family culture and can be used throughout the organisation, from D to the coordinators and from the coordinators to the teachers, to facilitate change, including the introduction of the points made in this paper.

The writing of this paper is part of the process of training for the new coordinator and the process of researching and writing has helped to create a greater understanding of the organisation. For this to be of benefit to the organisation as a whole, this paper will be discussed with D and C, to consider these ideas.

One of the most important areas of coordinating is training. In the past much of the training was carried out by the director, but this is now being transferred to the coordinators. This is in line with the study of Kotey and Sheridan (2004:480) where it has been observed that as a business grows the training functions are passed from “the owner-manager to middle management.”

## **Benefits for the organisation**

There are many potential benefits to the organisation if these points are adopted. Quality teaching can be encouraged, which will help to delight customers, and thus encourage them to return. Staff will be able to speak to the coordinator about small problems, instead of the director, which will have the double benefit of an answer being given as the coordinator is more available than the director, and giving the director more time to deal with more important problems and to focus more on strategic management. The biggest problem still remains, though – time, with the new coordinator teaching full-time and studying for this MSc this will always be a limiting factor in what can be done. One possible solution could be to give a reduced teaching schedule to coordinators, but the costs and benefits of this would need to be considered carefully by the director in the future. Other aspect for future research in the organisation could include the development of appraisal and observation programmes.

The title of this paper is “Expectations, desires and reality: the use of staff interviews to develop a new coordinator role in a private language school.” We have seen through the interviews the *expectations* of the director and the *desires* of the teacher for the new post, and the *reality* of the established coordinator. Time will tell as to which of these *expectations and desires* will become *reality* for the new post.

Word count: 4438

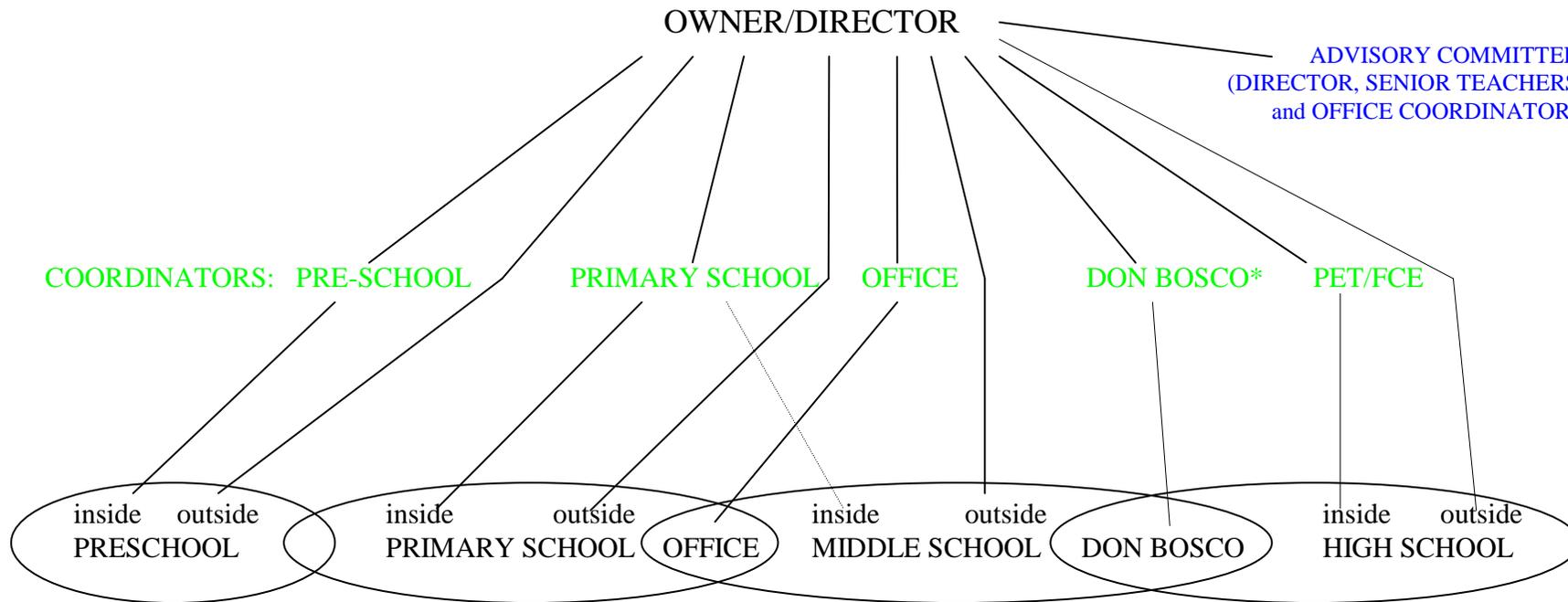
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Appendix 1

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE SCHOOL



Blue = strategic management    Green = quality management

The overlapping ovals represent staff who work with different types of school.

\*Don Bosco is a large middle school outside contract with four teachers working together.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Interview outline**

#### **The director**

History of the school

Why did he start the school?

How has it grown and why?

How does he see the culture of the school?

What are the strategic aims of the school?

What are the strong and weak points of the school?

What does he see as the biggest problems for the school as an organisation?

Does he think that the organisational chart is accurate and can it be useful for seeing ways to improve the organisation?

What does he get from the present coordinators?

Why did he want a new coordinator?

How does the new post fit in with the strategic aims for the school?

What would he like to get from him?

What does he see as limiting factors to these expectations?

## **Appendix 3**

### **Interview outline**

#### **The established coordinator**

How long has she been with the school?

How does she see the culture of the school?

What does she think are the strong and weak points of the school?

What does she see as the biggest problem for the school as an organisation?

Does she think that the organisational chart is accurate and can it be useful for seeing ways to improve the organisation?

How long has she been a coordinator?

What does her coordinator role involve exactly?

How does it help the organisation as a whole?

How does she think other staff members see her as a coordinator?

What are the main challenges of the job? Examples?

What do other staff members want from her?

What limits her from fulfilling these completely?

## **Appendix 4**

### **Interview outline**

#### **The teacher working with the new coordinator**

How long has she been with the school?

How does she see the culture of the school?

What does she think are the strong and weak points of the school?

Does she think that the organisational chart is accurate and can it be useful for seeing ways to improve the organisation?

What does she want from a coordinator?

What does she think that she will get?

Why are there differences?

## Appendix 5a

Abridged summary of the director's (D) comments. See appendix 2 for the interview outline.

The school has grown because of market conditions in the area with the main competitor for young learners moving towards the adult market. Changes in the law increasing English in state schools reduced the market for private schools, but also reduced the competition. The specialisation of the school in the young learners market was crucial to the school's success, with another school which started out at the same time under similar circumstances but in the adult market and not succeeding.

The growth of the school put many financial and personal strains on D.

The school grew because of quality teaching, and caring for the children. The teachers were expert children's teachers. Changing premises helped the school's expansion.

D is a teacher, so manages from a teacher's point of view. He likes to make teachers happy but doesn't have enough time. He feels that he has a good contact with his teachers but would like to carry out some lesson observation to help teacher development and to keep more control of what is going on in the school.

The bigger the school gets the harder the management becomes. With fourteen teachers it is harder to guarantee the quality of the teaching. There is a family atmosphere in the school, which is hard to maintain as the school grows.

D sees that he is an expert for young learners up to the age of 12, but for older students he needs to delegate the responsibility. He naturally wants to control everything, but recognises the need to delegate although it was hard to give responsibility away. This happened at first when he hired other teachers and then when he took on a secretary.

The advisory committee was set up a year ago to help him and to help value senior staff. C. is de facto director of studies for primary school courses, although the title is not used, and she doesn't like the title.

D in the past was involved with most of the courses, so there was no need for coronation.

Strategic aims could include opening another branch in a nearby town.

D wants everyone to do things his way, with the school ethic - care and concern, although he sees the value of initiative, and the importance of staff developing in their own way. He sees that his not having enough time can also be a good thing in that it allows other people to use their initiative. Care and concern is part of the coordinator's job. He wants to test the whole system of coordinators, which he thinks is a good thing. The role of coordinators is to ensure quality. One reason for the school's success is the right people.

## Appendix 5b

Key quotes from the Director (D)  
(Interviewer = I)

“It’s grown so well because it’s a specialist market. We just teach children.”

I “How did you cope with the management strains that put on you?” D: “Risking divorce and bankruptcy...”

“...the school grew because we were offering quality language teaching to children...”

“The management was just something, because you have your own business, you have to do it.”

“Until recently it was ... it wasn’t such a difficult job, and anyway it, it meant training someone to do something I was learning to do myself.”

“I think one of our successes is that we really care about young children.”

“The young children grew up and liked the school and wanted to continue with the school”

“It grew because we were offering quality teaching”

“It also grew because we changed premises”

“I’m a teacher, as you know, and I like to think that as a manager of the school I’m more in touch with teachers and teachers needs than a manager who has no teaching experience.”

“I do my best to make sure teachers are happy. I don’t have enough time, and that is a management problem. I think I should be following teachers more closely. The contact with most teachers is fine because we see each other almost every day. It might just be ‘hi, how are things’ but we do see each other, the contact’s there, but not with all the teachers some teachers who don’t work here there’s not much contact with them, but I would like to sit in on lessons.”

“I hope my teachers are happy, but as a manager I don’t want my teachers to think they can do whatever they like. If I had time I would sit in on their lessons it might help in that sense because obviously having your boss sitting in on your lesson it’s not something you want every day, but I would do it ... because it would give me ideas and I could give them ideas. That’s the main reason, but also a little bit of controlling what is going on.”

“The school is expanding...and now with fourteen teachers it’s not so easy to guarantee quality teaching and it’s, I don’t want this school to become too management orientated. I think it would lose it’s nice little family school atmosphere.”

“Delegating is fundamental. I have done that. So as I say, although perhaps my character tends to be yes I’d like to control everything that goes on, because it’s my school, it’s my second family... you must delegate.”

“It’s a problem of time. I don’t have time to help teachers plan their lessons.”

“While I am directly involved in the specialist teaching, the need for a coordinator isn’t really there.”

“I want coordinators and I want everyone in the school to do things my way. Probably not having enough time is also positive in the sense that I therefore delegate, I let people do their own thing. If I had more time perhaps I wouldn’t. I would like people to do things my way.”

“There is a certain ethic I would like to give to co-ordinating.” I “What would you say that ethic is?” D  
“That ethic is to care...care and concern...I see that in coordinator’s jobs as well”

“The quality has to be there, because this school is based on quality teaching.”

“We’ve been lucky enough to get the right people.”

## Appendix 6a

Summary of interview with the established coordinator (C). See appendix 3 for the interview outline. She started working part time since the beginning of the school 11 year ago. She has seen the school grow from two rooms in a small basement to having 14 teachers. The school has grown because of the high standard of teaching coupled with a need in the market for a specialised young learners school. The school takes children from pre-school all the way to high school. The management of the school is very easy going and informal. D is not a typical businessman, and is developing as a businessman as he goes along. The management of the school is at times not very professional. All the staff have been learning management together. This is good and bad - the atmosphere is very informal - teachers are left to themselves to decide how to teach, unless there is bad feedback. It would be better to be more 'present' especially with new teachers, to check lesson planning and observe some lessons. Strong points are the relaxed friendly atmosphere. The lessons are interesting for the children. Parents and teachers have a good feeling in the school. The child comes first is the philosophy of the school. There is no obvious hierarchy although she feels that as she has the most experience in the school that other teachers can ask her for advice.

Coordinators were established for new teachers to give them someone to go to for advice for specific age groups.

Weak points of the school are a lack of communication. D does not have enough time. Things are sometimes forgotten. The school can appear as being badly organised because of poor communication, messages not being passed on, people don't know what they should be doing, and not enough training being given. September is the time when new teachers need the most help but D and the coordinators have the least time to help. There could be a contradiction here with the importance of quality to the school. Selection of teachers is very important to ensure quality. Someone applying for a job with children should think beforehand if they can work with children. She is not a business woman, and does not want to be assistant director, but is happy to be a coordinator. D needs a right hand person, but C likes teaching. As the school gets bigger the problems will get bigger. D is trying to take on too much. D find it difficult to delegate because the school is his 'baby' and wants to control it. D spends too much time teaching and not enough time managing.

Coordinators are here to help give ideas for teaching. It is a new role for everyone. My role is to help new teachers, to give backup, moral support and teacher training. This will help ease the pressure from D, but he needs more help than with just teaching support. Coordinators have experience as teachers, not managers. New teachers have someone to go to, so it should take some pressure off D. She thinks new teachers want the following from a coordinator: ideas, where to find material, help with structuring the course, moral support, teacher training and someone to talk to as an intermediary with D to decide on minor problems without going to D. Decisions should be made by D, but as the school grows this will become harder, so he needs an assistant director. The main problem is finding time. She is happy to give individual help to teachers. She sees the coordinator role as one of helping new teachers. She cannot see how to solve the time problem.

## Appendix 6b

Key quotes from the established coordinator (C):

“I think it’s been successful, down to, hopefully the high standard of teaching. There was definitely a need for a school specifically for children.”

“There’s not very much competition for kids.”

I: “How would you describe the culture of the school?” C: “From the point of view of management, easy going, very easy going. Informal. D isn’t your typical business man. He’s developing as a business man as he goes along... Not always as professional as it could be.”

“We sort of bumbled our way along to where we are now.”

“The benefits from a teacher’s point of view are probably that there is a very informal atmosphere. There isn’t the sense that you are being watched and checked by a boss. You’re left pretty much to your own devices with regard to when you teach, unless, obviously, D gets bad feedback.”

“From an organisational point of view, I think it would be a positive thing to be a bit more present, particularly with new teachers, to check they are planning their lessons properly, and to watch some of the lessons that they actually teach. From a teacher’s point of view, the fact that they can work without feeling that somebody is checking them all the time, I suppose it would be down to individual teachers if she would prefer a little bit more supervision.”

“The school’s got a relaxed, friendly atmosphere.”

“I think parents get a very positive feeling. I hope teachers get a positive feeling, although it’s a bit hard to judge because I’ve been working here so long.”

“The child comes first is D’s philosophy. I think that that’s true.”

“I don’t think that parents or teachers see an obvious hierarchy.” I: “Do you think that’s a good thing or a bad thing?” C: “A bit of both really. For new teachers I think probably a little more structure is needed, and that’s why we’ve recently come up with the idea of coordinators for different age groups. I think that for new teachers that they do need to know that there is a particular person that they can go to talk about specific problems for specific age groups, particularly because we deal with so many age ranges at the school.”

“Weak points...communication between D and teachers there’s sometimes a breakdown in communication there because D is so busy. Things sometimes get forgotten because D doesn’t have time. Other weak points. I think the school can appear to new teachers and parents as being badly organised and unprofessional”

“People having been promised probably more training and then when it comes to doing the job they realise that they haven’t been the training they thought they were going to get or the help they were going to get because of lack of time. The season starts September October, everybody gets immediately busy, sorting out courses, getting courses off the ground, it’s a very busy period and that is probably the period when new teachers need the most help, and it happens to coincide with the busiest time for D and all the coordinators.”

“If the quality sometimes falls down it is probably because teachers haven’t been given the amount of training that probably is required for the job.”

“D is trying to take on too much.”

“I think D finds it difficult to delegate.”

On coordinators: “We’ve got a person people can go to if they’re teaching in the nursery school and need ideas and help and training for nursery school age kids.”

“The role of coordinator we are still trying to sort that one out because it is new for us. As I see my role it’s to help new teachers with material, with ideas, to give back-up, for teacher training, to give moral support as well. Yes, that will help ease the pressure off D.”

“The idea at the moment is that we’re there for helping teachers with specific age group related problems for teaching.”

“Maybe they could see it as an intermediate person between, before, a middle person that can also decide whether a problem requires D’s attention.”

On the challenges of co-ordinating : “Finding time ... It doesn’t always fit in with other people’s timetables.”

“I see it very much as helping out new teachers, teacher training.”

## Appendix 7a

Summary of interview with the teacher working with the new coordinator (T). See appendix 4 for the interview outline.

T has been with the school for a year and a half, with four years teaching experience in total. This is her first experience teaching children. The management of the school is relaxed. She doesn't feel under pressure to be a saleswoman, unlike other schools. She thinks that there is a family atmosphere in the school. There could be more training for the secondary school teachers - there is a lot for the primary age group, but nothing from the management - the teachers get together themselves to talk about teaching ideas. It is okay if you are lucky, and if you have got enough common sense, but it could be difficult for a new teacher. More advice should be given at the start for new teachers to seem more professional, and to be respected by the children and parents. The school has a family atmosphere because of D and the teachers he chooses. There is not a competitive feeling in the school. Continuity is a strong point of the school as children attend the school throughout their school career. Another strong point is the relationship between teachers. Weak points include poor organisation, and D being unavailable. There is more of a need for more management. Administration is poor and customer service is badly organised. She didn't realise that there were coordinators for the other parts of the school where she doesn't work. C gets stressed when other teachers consider her as D's assistant. Coordinator specifying text books for the courses is a good idea, and there should be more standardisation between the courses, not to take away teacher freedom, but to give a consistent product to the students and to help if a teacher needs covering. It is a good idea to co-ordinate the mock exams. To help the problem of D not having enough time, coordinators could create guidelines for the outside courses or an index of materials to use for new teachers. It is difficult to organise. She is thinking about this because of leaving soon and being worried about whoever will take over. Coordinators should help new teachers. C helped her last year. She does not notice any strategic management in the school, but perhaps D is trying to get new contracts with other outside schools. She does not think that D is very business minded but that he is doing what he loves and it has gone well. She does not think that he plans for the future or for future markets. D should encourage his teachers to stay. He is lucky that he has these people and does not realise how much extra work they put in because he is too busy. Giving more financial security to teachers would help to encourage people to stay but the tax system in Italy makes that difficult. A better staff room would help where you can prepare lessons without being disturbed. The office needs to be organised better.

## Appendix 7b

Key quotes from the teacher working with the new coordinator:

I like the fact that it's not such a pressured commercial atmosphere.

I like the fact that it's the concentration on the family atmosphere.

I think more could be done to help, we have days when we talk about teaching and things, it seems to be all very much concentrated on nursery school, primary school, there's never been very much about that for the secondary school...I probably needed, before I started teaching here, for example, more indications for how to behave.

I think that somebody when they first come in, so that they appear more professional ...I think that they should be given more advice on things like these (on discipline)

On the atmosphere: "It comes about from D and the people he chooses."

Strong points. Continuity. The fact that we cater for children from an early age up until the end of school days...and that there is a good relationship between the teachers and that all of the teachers are very helpful towards each other.

The weak points. I think that the organisation is quite poor. I think that D should be more available.

I think the management needs to be tightened up a bit.

When you first go to the school and nobody actually really tells you about a lot of things, and you don't really know who you're supposed to go to about a lot of things.

I think there should be some kind of standardisation between courses.

I think that guidelines need to be created for the secondary school courses... Indexes that new teachers especially can go to, to find all the materials.

Maybe some kind of sharing of materials and sharing of ideas.

I did feel a little bit lost last year.

On strategic management: "Maybe I don't really notice. I don't know what plans D's got."

I don't know how, and I don't mean this as a negative comment, how business minded D really is... I don't know how much planning he really does for future markets.

I think D's role should be to encourage the people he's got to stay. It's a pleasant school to work at, but I think he's quite lucky to have some of the people he's got working there who care about things as

much as they do, and maybe he doesn't always, because he's busy himself, realise how much extra people put in.