

From Language Teacher to Language Teaching Manager

Globally, the field of language teaching has expanded rapidly over the past twenty years driven by wider markets and more varied forms of English language provision. This expansion has created a demand for English language teachers and a concomitant need for managers of language teaching organizations (LTOs). As often happens in other fields, managers are typically recruited from within, drawn from among employees within the LTO. How easy is it for teachers to make the transition from classroom to director's office? What competencies do they already have and which ones need to be developed – and how can teachers go about developing them?

I have chosen to use the KASA (Knowledge, Skills, Attitude and Awareness) framework¹ for analysing and answering these questions. This model is one of the foundations underpinning the teacher education and professional preparation programmes at the School for International Training. It provides a very useful framework for looking at competencies and I have found it particularly apt in this instance. The information for each area has come from my own experience, various presentations I have done on the subject at conferences, and from consultation with participants in the International Diploma in Language Teaching Management (IDLTM).

Knowledge: *Knowing About*²

What information do I need to manage this school successfully?

The language program manager needs a lot of information in order to do his or her job well. This knowledge includes market information (who the clients and customers are, what the untapped part of the market consists of, who the competition are); resource information (what the school has at its disposal – financial resources, technological resources, building resources, human resources); institutional history and organizational structure. It also involves knowledge of the product that is being sold – in our case language teaching (as well as exams, curricula, coursebooks, etc). Finally it requires a knowledge of management theory and practices – just as teaching requires a knowledge of approaches to teaching and methodologies

Much of this information is already available to the teacher who has recently been promoted into the management position. She knows her students, she has an idea of the market and of the human and material resources. Depending on how long she has been working at the school, she has a sense of the institution's history and the academic structure. What she may not be aware of are the detailed financial information, the market (in terms of external factors and potential rather than actual students), and of course the non-academic aspects of the school management, coupled with the very real challenge of looking at the organization from an entirely different perspective. In many instances, it may be that teachers don't have a real sense of what management actually *is* – often a result of negative experiences from being badly managed themselves. In effect

¹ Freeman D. 1989 *Teacher Training, Development, and Decision-Making* TESOL Quarterly, 23(1) 27-45

² Moran P. 2001 *Teaching Culture: Perspectives in Practice* Boston: Heinle and Heinle

they have been the *recipients* of management, and as such have had a different sense of needs and expectations than as the *providers* of management.

There are a number of ways of coming by some of this information: books, for example, could provide some of the management theory, and local information that may be useful. The departing manager is obviously an invaluable source of knowledge, which in many cases can be easily tapped into – particularly if there is an overlap in the handover period. Shadowing the manager for a week or two before he or she leaves is an extremely useful exercise. Obviously working with the administrative staff is another important part of the process. Training courses or workshops can help with some of the aspects of management theory and an understanding of how organizations work, among other things.

Skills: *Knowing How*³

What skills do I already have that I need to adapt, and which skills do I need to acquire?

This may be the most important area for a new manager. Many management skills are fairly easy to transfer from the classroom, while others will need to be acquired. Some of the former might be time management, the general management cycle (planning, implementation, evaluation – very familiar to teachers), communication – and in particular listening - an essential management skill. The latter might include teacher supervision and evaluation, marketing, financial management, and customer relations. Based on my experiences teaching on and coordinating the IDLTM, the two areas of management that most strike fear into the former teacher are financial management and marketing. It is not because those skills are considered to be harder to learn than any others, but because most people feel like they are starting from scratch, having never managed organizational budgets or sold a programme before.

As with any other field, skills are difficult to pick up from a book, and in this area of competency acquisition, training courses and mentoring are particularly valuable. If you know a manager at another institution (probably not a competitor) try and tap into their abilities. If there are other managers at your school (and particularly if you are lucky enough to have a marketing and financial department, say), use them. If there is a director above you at the LTO, then see if they would be willing to act as a mentor.

Attitudes: *Knowing Why*⁴

Why do people behave the way they do? How can I become more aware of their attitudes?

Finding out people's motivations or the reasons behind certain facts can be tricky. Teachers are forced to do this all the time – asking why their students are there, what motivates them to study the language, what learning style they each have, which ones

³ *ibid*

⁴ *ibid*

among them respond to which activities and techniques, and so on. A new manager may know something about the attitudes of his clients and customers, and even some of his staff – particularly his teachers – but might need more information. Why do my staff choose to work here? What motivates my teachers? What historical issues are at play in the interactions and structure of the organization? What makes us tick - organizationally and from a human resource perspective?

Many of the abilities needed to determine these attitudes, values and motivations can be transferred directly from the classroom, but others will need to be acquired from other sources. A course in organizational behaviour or human resource management would be a good start, as would consulting with one of the many management books on the market. Other ways include attending conference presentations, joining SIGs (like this one), and sharing ideas with other managers. More locally, and specifically to your language teaching organization, there is a clearly a good case for sitting down with all your staff in one-on-one interviews to ask them what it is they like about their jobs, what they would like to change, and how their work life could be made more satisfying. In this way, not only do you get a sense of who your staff are, what brings them to work, what frustrates them, and what motivates them, but you also get to learn a lot about the organization that you might not have already known. One way of doing this successfully is to start with a “job model” activity – this is essentially a task in which both you and the staff member individually list what you feel their job involves and what its priorities are. This can provide an excellent set of information from which the conversation can evolve. You will almost certainly be surprised at the difference between your perception of someone’s role and their own!

Awareness: *Knowing Oneself*⁵

Who am I as a manager? What am I bringing to this role?

The easiest and simultaneously most challenging of the four areas. To give an example from my own past: When I began my career as a teacher one of my primary concerns in the classroom was to get my students to like me. It took quite a long time before I became aware that this was who I was as a teacher, and realized that this might even be overriding other considerations – like helping them learn English, for example. This kind of self-awareness is something that you have to reacquire when you move into a management position. Now, of course, it is about learning who you are *as a manager*.

One of the biggest challenges for a new manager who has recently been promoted out of the classroom is to deal with the shift in her relationships with the other teachers. However difficult it is to accept and however much everybody may hope that it doesn’t happen, there is a definite shift in the dynamic. Not long ago, I worked with a recently promoted manager in Eastern Europe who was really struggling with the fact that her friends in the staffroom were no longer – at least at work – her friends. There is not

⁵ *ibid*

necessarily any solution to this problem except for an awareness that it will occur, whether you like it or not.

So, who *are* you as a manager? Think about your first months in the classroom as a teacher and remember how you became aware of who you were as a teacher. It's the only way to speed up the process!

Summary

Just as teachers develop their competencies through a combination of training, experience, discussion and reflection, so, too, do managers. Furthermore, just as training is regarded as a vital part of becoming a teacher, and continuing professional development (CPD) is a way of continuing to learn and grow, so, too, is training and CPD vital for teachers who are becoming managers. The KASA framework outlined above, and summarized below, is a good starting model to ensure that one remembers to take into account all aspects of management rather than focusing only on the more obvious need for skill building.

Books can start one off on the path to good management, but just as with teaching, books alone are not enough. Personally, I would recommend training - tied closely to mentoring - as the clearest path to success for the language teacher moving into the manager's office. Good luck!

	Needs	Where from?
Knowledge: Knowing About <i>Getting Information</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource information • Academic programs • Market • Management theory • Etc... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Books (see below) • Shadowing outgoing manager • Management Courses (see below) • Talking to staff and other "experts"
Skills: Knowing How <i>Developing Expertise</i>	All management skills... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budgeting and financial management • Communication • Marketing • Academic management • Human Resource Management • Customer relations • Conflict management • Teacher supervision and observation • Etc... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management courses and programs • Books • Mentoring

<p>Attitudes: Knowing Why</p> <p><i>Discovering Explanations</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff motivations • Staff needs • Staff priorities • Organizational structure • Communication channels • Institutional history 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face-to-face meetings with staff • “Job Model” activity • Management courses • Organizational behaviour books
<p>Awareness: Knowing Oneself</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who am I as a manager? • What are my strengths and weaknesses? • How am I perceived by staff/customers? • What do I think makes a good manager? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection • Feedback from others

Useful Resources

Management Courses:

- The International Diploma in Language Teaching Management (IDLTM)
www.idlrm.org
- The IH Diploma in Educational Management
- ARELS Diploma in ELT Management
- Any number of less ELT specific MBA programs

Books

- *Management in English Language Teaching* White et al; CUP (1991)
- *Reframing the Path to School Leadership: A Guide for Teachers and Principals* Bolman and Deal; Sage Publications (2002)
- *A Handbook for Language Program Administrators* Kristison and Stoller; Alta Books (1997)
- *The ELT Managers Handbook* Impey and Underhill; MacMillan (1994)