

Anatomy of a Professionalization Project

The Making of the Modern
School Business Manager

Charlotte Woods

B L O O M S B U R Y

Anatomy of a Professionalization Project

Also available from Bloomsbury

Exploring the School Leadership Landscape, Peter Earley

Leading Schools in Challenging Circumstances, Philip Smith and Les Bell

The Reality of School Leadership, Richard Parker with David Middlewood

Evidence Informed Leadership in Education, Alison Taysum

State and Education Policy, edited by Helen M. Gunter

Anatomy of a Professionalization Project

The Making of the Modern
School Business Manager

Charlotte Woods

Bloomsbury Academic
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

B L O O M S B U R Y
LONDON • OXFORD • NEW YORK • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

Bloomsbury Academic

An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square
London
WC1B 3DP
UK

1385 Broadway
New York
NY 10018
USA

www.bloomsbury.com

BLOOMSBURY and the Diana logo are trademarks of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published 2014

Paperback edition first published 2016

© Charlotte Woods, 2014

Charlotte Woods has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Author of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

No responsibility for loss caused to any individual or organization acting on or refraining from action as a result of the material in this publication can be accepted by Bloomsbury or the author.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-7809-3590-4

PB: 978-1-4742-8253-6

ePDF: 978-1-7809-3793-9

ePub: 978-1-7809-3782-3

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Woods, Charlotte, author.

The anatomy of a professionalization project: the making of the modern school business manager / Charlotte Woods.

pages cm

ISBN 978-1-78093-590-4 (hardback)

1. School business administrators--Great Britain. 2. Public schools--Great Britain--Business administration. 3. School management and organization--Great Britain. I. Title. LB2823.5.W66 2014
353.8'24--dc23
2014017697

Typeset by Deanta Global Publishing Services, Chennai, India
Printed and bound in Great Britain

*To my parents, Leslie and Hazel Woods,
with love and gratitude*

Contents

List of Figures and Tables	ix
Acknowledgements	x
Foreword	xi
1 The Making of a New Profession: The Case Explained	1
Part 1 Politics and the Professional Project	
2 The School Business Manager Project in the Context of Public Sector Reform	19
3 The Public Sector Professional	35
Part 2 School Business Manager Professionalization	
4 The School Business Manager Professionalization Programme	51
5 Professional Knowledge and Skill	69
6 Credentials and Careers	85
Part 3 Professional Knowledge Applied	
7 Individual Perspectives on Professional Practice	107
8 Applying Expertise Inter-professionally	120
9 Institutional Arrangements and Knowledge Application	136
Part 4 Politics and the Professional Project	
10 Professionalism as Personal Project	157
11 Professionalism as Political Project	178
12 Professionalization Revisited	196
Appendices	
Appendix I: Overview of School Business Manager Research Projects and Data	213

Appendix II: Illustrative Interview Questions (All Categories of Respondent)	216
Appendix III: National College Chronology of Project ‘Milestones and Achievements’ April 2007–July 2010	220
Appendix IV: Excerpt from the School Business Manager Competency Framework: Facilitating Change	225
References	230
Index	237

List of Figures and Tables

Figure 3.1	Conceptualization of the ideal-typical profession (after Freidson 2001)	46
Figure 12.1	Anatomy of a professional project	197
Table 4.1	Certificate of School Business Management Modules	56
Table 4.2	Phases of the Advanced Diploma in School Business Management	63
Table 4.3	Estimated savings in 123 demonstration project schools	66
Table 5.1	SBM competency framework overview	74
Table 5.2	Overview of NPQH competencies reflecting three key dimensions	76
Table 5.3	Head teacher competencies in operational management	78

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the large number of respondents over the years, both named and anonymous, from whose experiences and perspectives this book is largely derived. People have shown enthusiasm for the research and have been generous with their time. I am particularly grateful to those whose testimony I have quoted at length, such as those featured in Chapters 10 and 11, and to Graham Butt for his Foreword. Sincere thanks are also due to Trevor Summerson and to other members of the National College's SBM team for their cooperation and contributions. I gratefully acknowledge the support of my colleagues at the University of Manchester, UK, including the contributions of my main co-researchers on various SBM projects over the years: Diana Pearson, Joanna Bragg and Paul Armstrong. In addition, I am truly indebted to Helen Gunter for her encouragement and inspiration and to Sarah Irving for her secretarial skills. Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their patience and support, especially my husband, Derek Davies.

Foreword

Charlotte Wood's book on the professionalization of School Business Managers (SBMs) offers a valuable insight into the role of a group of education support workers who have, until now, remained largely ignored by education researchers. The importance of the contribution of this professional cadre to the efficient functioning of schools is undeniable; indeed their work has taken on a greater urgency in recent austerity times. The experience of SBMs is arguably typical of other support and administrative staff in schools, including teaching assistants, whose work has traditionally been regarded as rather low status. Indeed, it has seemed secondary to the 'front line' educational work of schools, lacking relevance to the immediacy of the common and urgent problems that have to be addressed during each school day. The efforts of SBMs have therefore largely remained unseen and unacknowledged. As such, this book recognizes and celebrates the contribution of a group of education employees who have previously been marginalized in schools and have stayed invisible within the published outputs of researchers in education.

The SBM professionalization project was launched in England by New Labour in 2001, at a time when similar schemes were being devised and introduced across the public sector (not least within health and the police force, which provide us with interesting points of comparison). The conversion of bursars into SBMs was part of a 'restructuring and reculturing' (Butt and Gunter 2007) of the state education workforce, with principles of modernization at the heart of the process. The then Secretary of State for Education, Estelle Morris, visualized the training of 1,000 bursars in 5 years in a series of programmes that paralleled other workforce reforms in schools and saw the eventual launch of the National Agreement on Raising Standards and Tackling Workloads in 2003 (DfES 2003b). Here we see the impact of a growing neoliberal agenda – reconfigured by New Labour as a 'Third Way' approach, which attempted to straddle the state-market binary – which sought to draw back the role of the state and place greater responsibility on public sector institutions to become entrepreneurial. As Charlotte rightly observes, drawing on the work of Hartley and Skelcher (2008):

following a period of criticism, devaluing, privatization and disinvestment generated by the rise in neoliberal ideologies in the 1980s and 1990s, a more

refined version of neoliberalism has emerged that recognises the importance of state services in ensuring social and economic stability but which relies on a new coalition between business and public sector actors (p. 18).

Faith was increasingly being placed in markets and their ability to regulate many aspects of society, through the application of business assumptions and corporate modes of thinking. This shift was played out in terms of workforce reform, with concepts such as ‘remodelling’, ‘modernization’ and ‘civilianization’ being applied to the roles previously held by public sector workers. Reform occurred against a backdrop of the public’s apparent loss of confidence in state-run bodies following various scandals – including instances of mismanagement and financial impropriety within public sector institutions (although, of course, similar problems also occur within the private sector). The call for rethinking regulation, reshaping codes of conduct and reforming public sector management – with the aim of increasing efficiency, achieving greater economies, being less bureaucratic and offering more open accountability – was heard from politicians across the political spectrum. However, such reforms are never clear cut. The issues that arise are well rehearsed: the public and private sectors *are* very different, with contrasting aims, values and conceptualizations of goods; this makes the wholesale application of principles from one to the other both questionable and often impractical. Public money is at stake (controlled by politicians, not shareholders) the use of which should be publicly accountable and agreed. As Charlotte points out, the public sector is also called upon to operate in areas of market failure (such as addressing aspects of extreme poor health, social deprivation, environmental problems, ageing) where the tensions between social imperatives and economic considerations are complex and value-laden.

The role of the SBM was visualized as representing a departure from that of the traditional conception of school bursars (although this term remained persistent in many schools), who were about to experience a drive to increase their professional training and status. The expectations placed on SBMs in most schools has now advanced significantly from the previous job descriptions of finance managers, bursars and other secretarial or administrative staff who carried out elements of school financial management in the past. The origins of reform lie back in a previous political era, back to the introduction of the 1988 Education Reform Act with its reassessment of how schools should be administered and run. Subsequent legislation forced a shift of power from local authorities to heads and governors, increasing their responsibility to bid

for money and manage their own financial affairs. The ongoing privatization of school services is witnessed currently in the accelerating growth of academies and free schools, which are rapidly taking over from traditional state-run comprehensives. Charlotte's comment on this is pertinent:

The Academies programme embodied key aspects of New Labour thinking and the role of privatisation in their reform agenda: social responsibility, new forms of leadership and governance, innovation and technology, tackling social disadvantage and exclusion and importing business language and practices. Exempt from many of the normal restrictions of state education, such as following the national curriculum and national agreements over employee pay and teacher education, academies were expected to employ technical and market solutions to educational problems (p. 104).

The political drive for educational reform, initiated by New Labour and partly delivered through training and professional development programmes provided by the National College for Teaching and Leadership (previously the National College for School Leadership), is a constant theme. The need for greater professionalization was clear – in the modern era of enhanced business management in education (and elsewhere) senior managers and leaders no longer held the requisite knowledge, skills, technical expertise, abilities and reserves of time necessary to ensure the sound financial management of their schools. The requirement for SBMs to fill this gap was championed, but their enhanced status in schools has often been hard won – in many schools the role of the SBM has been questioned by other professionals, or treated with a degree of scepticism or outright prejudice.

The lack of previous research into the contribution of SBMs to the management of schools is perhaps surprising – schools are undeniably 'big businesses', with a significant proportion of the public purse allocated to state education being managed by SBMs. Indeed, since the turn of the century, each new government in the United Kingdom has sought to increase the managerial responsibilities of state schools in this area, shifting the onus for financial management away from local authorities and into the hands of head teachers, Senior Leadership Teams (SLTs) and governing bodies. The importance of employing well trained, dedicated and professional SBMs has therefore increased as heads have sought to employ skilled staff capable of managing increasingly complex budget arrangements – something which many heads had previously managed (or overseen) with only limited training. During this transition the research focus has largely been elsewhere – driven by agendas to pursue greater understanding

of educational leadership and management, or drawn to research aspects of 'what works' in classrooms. In this book, the nature of professionalism, and its acquisition through 'professionalization', assumes centre stage drawing on the work of other commentators in this area (such as Freidson 2001). The qualities that constitute a professional body – its values, knowledge sets and working practices – and the use of competencies or standards to codify and accredit these qualities, are all explored.

We learn much about schools as organizations by exploring how they are managed and led. We know that government policy, from both New Labour and the Coalition, has attempted to embed greater organizational responsibilities on state schools – not least in the ways in which they handle their finances and how they are conceived as businesses – introducing reforms which have been met with equivocal responses from educationists. What Charlotte attempts here is to explore, on the basis of findings gleaned from empirical data, the impacts of such policy shifts on those who are at the sharp end of change: the students, teachers, senior managers, head teachers, governors and, importantly, the SBMs themselves. This endeavour is facilitated by her decade-long work with the National College involving the evaluation of survey data and research projects, many of which were directly linked to the SBM professionalization project. The testimony of a number of agents has been sought through one-to-one interviews – with politicians, policymakers, education leaders and business managers each offering their perspectives on professionalization. How the SBM role was achieved forms a central spine of this book. Around this the neoliberal reforms that affected the public sector (and which saw public institutions being driven towards business-orientated management and being encouraged to compete for 'customers' and 'clients') are clearly drawn. Here themes of privatization, decentralization, accountability and increasing organizational autonomy are evident, witnessed at the micro scale in individual schools but also clearly influenced by forces that play out on a national and international scale.

Charlotte has chosen to structure her book in four sections – in turn considering the role of politics in establishing the professional training of SBMs, the project itself, the application of professional knowledge, and an overview of the interplay between politics and project. There is much here of interest to the reader who is keen to understand the ways in which (education) policies are devised, implemented and supported – not least in the ways in which a political imperative to deliver a particular project can result in the application of 'aggressive timescales' that may neither support the practitioners involved,

nor guarantee the project's ultimate success. The scope of enquiry is spread widely – there is reference to global forces and the impacts of globalization on policy-making in general and on the nature of business managers' work in particular. Parallel projects initiated across the public sector, with particular mention of health and policing, are also referenced. The training courses, professional development activities, certification and awarding of qualifications associated with the professionalization project are well documented – starting with the Certificate of School Business Management (CSBM) in 2002, followed by the Diploma in School Business Management (DSBM) (2003), Advanced Diploma in School Business Management (ADSBM 2008) and School Business Director (2009), all designed and delivered by the National College. The development of these courses indicate an expected 'direction of travel' for SBMs, with the most advanced diplomas being targeted towards staff who would assume increasingly complex workloads, often managing financial affairs across consortia of schools. Charlotte has gathered a wealth of empirical evidence, mostly from interviewing those who are stakeholders in the professionalization project, eschewing a narrow line of enquiry driven primarily along theoretical or ideological axes. The importance of this approach is clear, for there are inherent dangers of recourse to partiality, polemicism and bias in researching such matters – which the methodology employed tries hard to avoid.

The later chapters (Chapter 10 onwards) are constructed around interviews held with six stakeholders who were either instrumental to the success of the SBM professionalization project, or who can offer insightful comments on its impact. These include Estelle Morris, a previous Secretary of State for Education and Employment, and Trevor Summerson, who was the civil servant seconded to the National College to oversee the project. Accounts from SBMs from national jurisdiction where the National College's work has been influential – Australia, New Zealand and South Africa – give the book an international flavour. We are also offered, in Figure 12.1 – 'Anatomy of a professional project' – a conceptualization of the processes of professionalization that have been in play, drawing together the interconnectedness of elements in what has been a complex, long-term project. This model attempts to offer a lens for the consideration of the project's impacts and processes at different spatial scales (or 'layers') – from that of the individual actor, to considerations of the interplay of international factors. These are offered within three segments (on developing, promoting and applying expertise). What results is a conceptualization of professional development in the form of a helpful model, which can be referred

to both for the purpose of explanation and for the promotion of further questions.

In conclusion, this book seeks to provide an original conceptualization of the professional role of SBMs, based on research into the processes by which SBMs are trained, the roles they adopt and the results they achieve. It seeks to offer a commentary on policy and practice, at the same time serving as an encouragement to further research in this area. The professional lives of SBMs, who often experienced uneasy shifts from a business to an education environment, are laid out for consideration – accompanied by a commentary on the nature of their professional training, their career prospects, issues of job security and their loyalty, motivation, commitment and longevity within their particular posts. Comments about the day-to-day challenges and opportunities provided within schools, whose cultures are often very different to those of the business sector, are pertinent. A fascinating substratum within these accounts is the retelling of the SBMs' relationships with their head teachers, senior management teams and teachers in schools. Their experiences vary from being viewed as financial saviours, to being dismissed on ideological grounds – with concomitant effects on their working relationships with staff. The leadership style of head teachers, and whether they are capable of 'letting go' of areas of financial management which they previously controlled, also attracts comment. This all speaks to aspects of trust, raises questions about the parameters set for SBMs' work, and of their ability to enter into a 'negotiation of jurisdictions' (p. 99).

In her consideration of professionalism in education, Helen Gunter rightly observes that 'each generation inherits, reworks and leaves legacies . . . inside and outside schools there are contested notions, practices and expectations about traits and behaviours' (Gunter and Butt 2007, p. 225). Charlotte's exploration of the SBM project illustrates these points well, taking us beyond Gunter's immediate focus on teachers and teaching to allow a closer consideration of the professionalization of SBMs in schools.

Graham Butt
Professor in Education
Oxford Brookes University

The Making of a New Profession: The Case Explained

This book concerns the professional journey of one occupational grouping. The word 'professional' is a tricky one. It is not at all easy to pin down and comes laden with baggage around what being 'professional', or, perish the thought, 'unprofessional' means. One thing is beyond question, however. The working lives of professionals have changed irrevocably in many countries. But as the established professions have been grappling with the impacts of public sector reforms during this period, new occupational groupings have been taking advantage of opportunities, or have been 'groomed', to take on more prominent roles within their organizations. It is within this context that the research reported here was born. It examines questions around what being a 'professional' means, what building the reputation and status of an occupational grouping entails, and what the experiences of those targeted by such activities might be.

The book documents and analyses the professional project of one up-and-coming occupational grouping. In examining this single case from multiple perspectives, it captures the particularities of the professional project under investigation and records a slice of history. Further, through this process it develops a comprehensive, empirically derived framework for understanding professional projects in general. In this way it is hoped that this account of the research will provide conceptual clarity and indicate important lessons for those working or researching in other professional realms.

The book charts, analyses and discusses a systematic attempt by the government in England to place on a firm professional footing a poorly understood but increasingly influential member of the school community: the site-based school business manager (SBM). The SBM professional project is a particularly interesting one in bringing into stark relief many of the tensions inherent in the business-led reforms that have altered professional work so profoundly in recent history. The work of school business managers, and employees with financial and

administrative responsibilities in other public services, has become absolutely crucial in recent decades as public sector institutions have simultaneously been required to adopt the practices of business and become responsible for managing their own financial affairs. What the research shows is that school business managers' (SBMs') work is deeply enmeshed in every aspect of school life, often requiring them to work very closely with the lead professional, the head teacher.

Despite the entanglement of business thinking and practices in the functioning of modern public sector organizations and in the work of lead professionals, the perspectives of business management colleagues have been largely excised from academic research and debate. In examining the SBM professional project, the book reveals a novel perspective from that of more established occupational groupings, such as teachers, doctors, lawyers and police officers, whose experiences of public sector reform have been extensively researched and widely reported. However, though their professional concerns appear very different on the surface, the study data indicate that the viewpoints of SBMs have more in common with those of educators than might be supposed.

Theoretically the research rests mainly on the scholarship of professionalism, and particularly with reference to education and health. However, though theoretically informed, the work is empirically driven. It stays close to the standpoints of individual practitioners, drawing on the first-hand accounts of SBMs at different career stages, lead professionals internationally and those who have been active in the policy and politics of the professional project at the national level in England. In essence, it employs individual perspectives on the realities of professional life to examine and extend theory. Original data and analysis are used to illuminate questions around what being a professional means, what constitutes professional knowledge and how sociopolitical, institutional, interpersonal and individual factors can influence the ability to apply such knowledge effectively. The book also offers a new, holistic conceptualization of professional projects as complex, multifaceted processes, and offers suggestions of how this conceptualization might be used to inform policy, practice and research in professionalism in education and other areas of public service. In these ways it is hoped that the book will serve not only as a resource for those with an interest in school leadership, schools as organizations or school business management specifically, but also as a means of developing systematic understanding of the many factors involved in shaping the collective fates of occupational groupings more generally.

Why the SBM case?

The unit of analysis for the research is the professional project of school business managers (SBMs) in England since 2001, when an initiative was launched by the national government to put this occupational grouping on a firmer professional footing. Much of the data comes from SBMs and head teachers working in the primary phase of schooling where the deployment of specialist SBM expertise is much newer and less widespread than in secondary schools. The case stands as an example of a policy-supported professional project targeting associate staff in the public sector, of the kind that are currently underway across a range of public service areas and in different national contexts.

The SBM project offers a unique opportunity to develop understanding of the progress of a professional project. First, it commenced within recent memory, so the perspectives of key participants in the project could be captured via interview. Second, the imposition of punishing policy timescales meant that many of the processes involved in achieving occupational recognition were evident in microcosm within a relatively short timeframe, rather than lost or diluted with the passage of time. Third, it is increasingly acknowledged that the processes of globalization mean that government policy can only really be understood from an international perspective. The international reach of the professionalization project described here make it a particularly worthy candidate for study. Fourth, policies in one area of public service are everywhere mirrored in other branches of the sector, and it is expected that the insights developed will have strong resonances with parallel projects in other areas of provision, such as health and policing.

Though the focus of this book is on the period since 2001, it should be acknowledged that schools, especially in the secondary phase, have long employed staff to deal with administrative and financial work. However, there are significant challenges in tracing the development of the SBM function in England. The first is the fact that the 'modern-day' SBM, and their predecessors, in common with other education administrative and support staff remain almost entirely absent from academic accounts of school life (O'Sullivan et al. 2000; Starr 2012a). Second, the SBM function is highly variable and difficult to describe or study in a systematic way. Yet schools are increasingly run along business lines, with very significant sums of money to manage as autonomous entities. The sums involved are staggering, with Starr (2012a) estimating that 'education takes approximately one third of government budgets in most advanced societies' (p. 14). Every educational decision has financial implications and the amount schools spend

on each of their pupils varies widely. In a bid by ministers to encourage efficiency and wider scrutiny, details of individual school expenditure per pupil were made public for the first time in England in 2011, alongside school league tables. In these circumstances, and in the context of recession, the business management function in schools is of singular significance.

It is possible to propose various reasons why SBMs have occasioned so little scholarly interest. First, conversations with SBMs internationally, and the evidence presented in this book, suggest that politicians have not fully understood the implications for school business management practice of the relentless drive towards school autonomy. Given the speed at which policy is implemented, research inevitably lags behind. Under the circumstances, it is unsurprising that the academic community perhaps have not fully grasped the significance of what is taking place either. Second, research has identified leadership and teaching and learning as being fundamental in ensuring high-quality educational outcomes. It is therefore entirely appropriate that both policy and research attention should focus primarily on these two areas. Nonetheless, regardless of the educational expertise available, schools, as any organizations, will only be maximally effective if resources are well managed. As schools become ever more autonomous in managing their own affairs, the way in which educational and business thinking integrate in delivering state schooling is therefore of fundamental significance. Third, it is highly probable that many people, academics included, see SBMs as form-fillers, who undertake work which is dull and largely irrelevant to the main purpose of schools. This picture is a very far cry from the one that emerges in the chapters that follow. Many of the SBMs interviewed were passionate about their work, enjoying its frenetic pace, extraordinary variety, and the strong sense of satisfaction in contributing to the education of children, much as a teacher would. Fourth, it is perhaps possible that, because of the words 'business' and 'management' in their job title, the SBM role will forever be tainted by association with 'everything that is wrong with education' in the minds of some among the academic community.

Whatever the reasons, the academy's focus on lead professionals to the exclusion of others seems at the very least inconsistent with its role in giving voice to marginalized groups. At worst, it indicates a lack of awareness of the realities of modern schooling that reduces the potential value of the contribution of education research and scholarship in shaping its future. A further serious consequence is that it reinforces the idea that lead professionals alone carry responsibility for the quality of public service provision, piling yet more pressure onto what can already be challenging working lives.

This book will attempt to demonstrate that the SBM role, and by implication the role of the support staff in schools and other public service institutions, has been marginalized and rendered invisible in education scholarship long enough. The evidence presented in this book indicates that SBMs are, by and large, a group with a strong commitment to education and who possess expertise that is essential to the functioning of the contemporary school. Further, in contrast to their education colleagues, SBMs are typically socialized to ‘speak the language’ of business and policy and are therefore able to make proposals and voice arguments in ways that policy actors find persuasive. Their actual and potential contribution to schooling is immense but largely unacknowledged by the academic community. Education professionals have had limited success in countering the damaging effects of education reforms in recent decades. However, the policy drive towards autonomy may yet provide an opportunity. As academy chains, school clusters and other kinds of school grouping become increasingly widespread, working together and pooling their complimentary expertise, educational leaders and SBMs speaking with one voice could be a real force to be reckoned with in resisting and influencing future policy developments. Rather than continuing to place a narrow focus on educators as the lead professionals in schools, what are urgently required are new, more inclusive and more interdependent versions of what professionalism in the service of the public means today.

A few words on terminology

In this introductory chapter, it is necessary to clarify the use of certain words and phrases. First, this section provides a brief gloss of the terms used in the book’s title to establish some of the key ideas and assumptions that underpin the work. Second, it identifies the labels to be adopted throughout to denote roles and entities that have either changed their names over the course of the project, or those that differ with national context.

The title begins with the word ‘anatomy’, here understood as ‘the dissection or dividing up of anything . . . for the purpose of examining its parts; detailed examination, analysis’ (OED 2013). Based on a theoretical model of what a professional project consists of, and through examining evidence from key actors in that project, the book offers an in-depth and original analysis of one instance of the phenomenon. The second phrase in the title, ‘professionalization project’, conveys the common idea in the professionalism literature of an occupation

engaged in a process over time, a project whereby members strive for a position of respect and influence and to be seen as worthy of the label 'professional'.

The next term, 'making', emphasizes the idea of 'creation'. Unlike long-established occupations, which are assumed to have been in the driving seat on their journeys towards professional recognition, the professional status achieved to date by those working in school business management in England was spearheaded by the state. Though undoubtedly accomplished through the collective efforts of individual practitioners, the SBM profession as it exists today was, in this sense, 'made' or 'created' by government. As the next term in the title suggests, professional projects are essentially 'modernizing', pertaining to the 'progressive differentiation and rationalization of the division of labour in industrial societies' with the progress of science and technology (Larson 1977, p. xiii). The SBM project is no exception, being born of sweeping reforms of the education workforce set in train under New Labour (Butt and Gunter 2007; Woods 2009) and part of a trajectory of 'high modernism' or 'hyper-innovation' throughout the Thatcher-Major-Blair administrations (Pollit 2007). The SBM role as characterized by the New Labour project is a distinct departure from its progenitors (finance officer, bursar, administrative assistant, secretary and so on), and is one tailor-made for the 'modern' school context in all its multifarious guises.

As the main focus of the book, the next phrase of the title, 'School Business Manager', will not be explained at length here. However, one aspect of the role that is important to emphasize at this point is that it involves applying knowledge in public service and thus has something in common with employees with business management functions in other public institutions. As distinctions between public and private become ever less clear cut, the idea of 'publicness' becomes increasingly hard to define. It can also sit uneasily with discussion of business management for some within the education community. Nonetheless, 'publicness' and 'public service' are central themes throughout the book. 'Publicness' is here understood as a commodity that must be guarded vigilantly and reinforced as a first line of defence against the worst excesses of business-oriented changes to the objectives, structures and norms traditionally associated with public service (Haque 2001).

There has been an explosion of management knowledge since the late 1970s, and the swelling ranks of 'the management reform community' may in large part explain the pace and reach of management-oriented changes within the public sector internationally (Pollit 2007). It is interesting that education is ahead of the game in England in turning attention to the professionalization of its managers

at the organizational level. As signalled in the next chapter, the need for action on the professional development of hospital managers became a matter of policy concern only in 2013. The same year also saw the launch of National Police College, though their immediate focus is on the training and accreditation of police officers. Given this burgeoning policy interest in professionalization, this study may offer a useful point of comparison for the professional projects of management colleagues in other public service areas.

Because the names of entities and preferred labels for concepts and groupings change routinely in academic and policy circles, it is useful to clarify some of the terms to be used in the remainder of the book. First, the titles of individuals executing business management functions within schools vary enormously with national context and have evolved over time. The term School Business Manager (SBM) is therefore adopted for the sake of simplicity unless a specific title is required. The title held by the lead educator in schools also varies. Though 'principal' is becoming more common, 'headteacher' is still the most usual title in England. 'Headteacher' is also the term that most commonly appears in quotations from interviewees, and is therefore the one adopted here.

The government department responsible for schools has changed several times since 2001. For the sake of convenience 'the Department' will be employed throughout as shorthand, unless the full name is required. Second, The National College was launched under New Labour as the National College for School Leadership with, according to their website at the time, 'the aim of delivering leadership development programmes for school personnel, providing support and resources for school leaders and acting as a stimulus for research, innovation and debate'. It has undergone several changes in terms of title and remit since then and under the current administration it has been formally recognized as the training arm of the Department. For the interested reader, details of its origins and early history can be found in a dedicated issue of the journal *Educational Management Administration and Leadership* (Bush 2004). The College was merged with the Teaching Agency in April 2013 to become the National College for Teaching and Leadership. Henceforth, it will be referred to as the National College or simply the College.

This chapter continues with brief background on the origins of the Government's SBM professionalization initiatives, which lay in the significant sociopolitical changes that preceded its launch. It then outlines the understanding of professionalism that underpins the research, sets out the book's purposes and ends by charting the structure of the remainder of the book.

Origins of the SBM project

Since 2001 the English government has invested significantly in a systematic national programme of ‘professionalization’ of school business management staff coordinated by the National College. Prior to this, the label ‘school business manager’ was rarely used, with very different duties being carried out by colleagues in different schools, with a variety of titles (bursar, administrative officer, finance officer, school secretary, etc.) and highly variable levels of responsibility and remuneration (O’Sullivan et al. 2000; Starr 2012a; Woods 2009). But this begs the question of what lay behind this major policy initiative.

Changes in the public sector internationally over the last three decades or so have sharpened the need for business acumen in public sector organizations. The economic reforms that came to prominence in the Reagan-Thatcher era of the 1980s embedded within the public realm practices formerly associated with for-profit organizations. Increasingly schools, hospitals and other public organizations were required to behave more like businesses and to compete with one another for ‘customers’. This trend, alongside increased public expectations about service quality, advances in technology and the tendency for responsibility for decision-making in key areas to rest with individual organizations rather than regional authorities, has had very dramatic impacts on the type of work that goes on in these organizations and on the professional lives of those involved in it. The purpose of this book is not to debate impact of neoliberal reforms on established professions. That territory has already been extensively explored in education scholarship and in other public services (Dent 2006; Farrell and Morris 2003; Gray 1991; W. M. Sullivan 2005). Rather, it seeks (i) to reveal what is involved in developing new kinds of professionals to help meet the multiple challenges faced by public sector institutions, and, from these, (ii) to develop empirically, and theoretically derived understandings of professional projects more broadly.

A report by management consultants in 2001 indicated a lack of administrative and financial support for head teachers endeavouring to run schools along business lines, which required skills and knowledge that fell outside the professional roles for which they were originally trained (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2001). Just as with physicians, poor recruitment and retention rates for teachers and head teachers became a matter of concern. In 2001, the then Secretary of State for Education and Employment, Estelle Morris, announced a commitment by central government to train a thousand experts in finance and administration