

# School business managers in England: negotiating identity

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1266

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to explore the concept of group identity formation amongst school business managers in the English school system.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Data were generated via a research project that employed semi-structured interviews with school business managers as a means of exploring their experiences as a relatively nascent group, carving out their own territory within a school system traditionally led and managed by trained educationalists.

**Findings** – The findings provide insight into the enabling and inhibiting factors encountered by school business managers in establishing and negotiating a distinguishable group identity within the wider school workforce including their variable career trajectories and motives, the suitability of their qualifications and the diverse composition of their roles.

**Originality/value** – The paper throws light on the identity formation of a cohort of the school workforce in England who are not directly involved in educational leadership or classroom practice but nevertheless play a crucial role in the ecosystem of the school. While the research reported is situated within England, the issues raised can be applied to education systems in other contexts given the universal importance of financial and organizational management in schools.

**Keywords** Identity, Educational management, School business management

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

In England, schools are complex organizational structures with sizable budgets often operating in collaboration with other schools and agencies. Furthermore, recent structural reforms implied by the growth of the academies program and the associated decline of the local authority[1] or district-level government are symptomatic of a shift towards what has been termed a “school-led system” (Hargreaves, 2010). Against this backdrop, the role of the school business manager has evolved as a key position for schools adapting to a turbulent policy landscape that has necessitated an increase in organizational management capacity (Woods, 2014). The individuals occupying these roles are situated in an interesting position within the ecosystem of the school. School business managers are often members of the school leadership team with considerable influence and decision-making responsibility over financial, resourcing and organizational matters. Further, they are likely to be the only non-qualified teacher member of the school leadership structure yet the nature of their work and the areas of the school for which they hold responsibility dictate that they are also classed as support staff distinct from the qualified teacher members of the workforce. As such they occupy multiple group memberships within their schools (Armstrong, 2014).

This paper reports on empirical data from a research project that employed semi-structured interviews with school business managers as a means of exploring their experiences as a relatively nascent group, carving out their own territory within a school system traditionally led and managed by trained educationalists. Informed by social identity theory and group formation (Tajfel, 1978; Hogg and Abrams, 1988), the paper draws on interview data in which participants discuss their career trajectories and perceptions of both their role and the burgeoning community of school business managers to which they belong. Recent and on-going structural reforms to the school system in England have had a profound influence on the means by which schools are managed financially organizationally. The school business management function sits at the forefront of these changes, yet the role and the wider



community to which it belongs remain in its infancy. The findings offer insight into the enabling and inhibiting factors encountered by this cohort in establishing and negotiating a distinguishable group identity within the wider school workforce. As such the school business manager role provides an intriguing case through which to explore the notion of identity formation.

There is a small body of literature that has focussed on this cohort of the school workforce charting the emergence and growth of the school business management function and school business manager role (O'Sullivan *et al.*, 2000; Wood *et al.*, 2007; Woods, 2014) and the national policy directives that have promoted its growth within the English school system (Woods *et al.*, 2010). Further afield, there is a limited scholarly acknowledgment of the organizational manager role in schools. For instance, the educational administrations of Australia (Starr, 2012), New Zealand (Woods, 2014) and South Africa (Woods, 2014) boast systems of school business management that are broadly aligned to the English context. North America also has a long established profession of school business officials though these individuals tend to operate at the district rather than school level (Armstrong, 2015). More broadly, the notion of school-based management with the context of decentralization of education systems has been a topic of discussion across the western world (Nir and Miran, 2006; Cheong Cheng, 1993). However, the means by which schools are managed from a financial and organizational perspective remains an under researched area of the wider field of education (Mertkan, 2011; Woods, 2014) and, in particular, there is little insight into the individuals that fulfil this function. Indeed, academic debates surrounding identity within schools have focussed predominantly on educational leaders (e.g. Busher, 2005) and teachers (e.g. Day *et al.*, 2006). The contribution made by this paper is therefore valuable because it throws light on the identity formation of a cohort of the school workforce who are not directly involved in educational leadership or classroom practice but nevertheless play a crucial role in the ecosystem of the school. While the research reported is situated within the English context, the issues raised might be applied to education systems in other contexts given the universal importance of financial and organizational management in schools.

### **The emergence of the school business manager in England**

For many commentators, school systems and education policy globally have been influenced by a broader ideological shift in the economic and social policies of nation states over the last 40 years (Ball, 2012; Rizvi and Lingard, 2010), the principles of which are underpinned by the notion of a free market economy where the role of the "state" to provide social services and manage public expenditure is reduced via deregulation and privatization (Harvey, 2005). In England, it is argued that the consequences of this shift have been clearly revealed through the considerable reforms to the public sector since the late 1970s, typified by reductions in public expenditure and an increased focus on managerialism, marketization, efficiency, performance measurement and accountability within public services (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2000).

It is against this backdrop that the role of the school business manager has emerged and evolved in the state school sector in England in response to an increasing requirement for schools to operate as small- to medium-sized businesses in an increasingly market-driven and competitive environment where the role of district government has been vastly reduced (O'Sullivan *et al.*, 2000; Woods, 2014). Moreover, the growth of the academies program in England has seen vast numbers of schools convert to academy status thereby being released from district government control and handed more responsibility and autonomy for their own organizational and financial affairs (Jones, 2016). It is worth highlighting that while some of the many schools that have converted to academy status have done so through the single academy trust (SAT) model (effectively operating alone), a much larger number, around two thirds of current academies, have established or joined a multi-academy trusts (MAT) where two or

more academy schools operate in a chain under the same overarching body. The MAT structure is of particular interest as it appears to be the current government's preferred model of academisation (Ehren and Godfrey, 2017). MATs can range from small clusters of schools within close geographical proximity to much larger groups comprising both primary and secondary schools sometimes operating over larger areas and across regional boundaries. There is also considerable variation in the policies and practices of schools within and between MATs whilst many of the larger MATs have established their own centralized financial and operational systems and services (Salokangas and Chapman, 2014; Ehren and Godfrey, 2017), similar to those found in district authority structures. School business managers operating in schools that are members of larger MATs such as those described above may therefore have less responsibility than their counterparts in SATs or MATs without centralized operational functions. Structurally then, the school system in England is quite a complex arena though it seems safe to suggest that as more schools convert to academies and the capacity of district authorities continues to decrease, the profile of those individuals at the forefront of the operational and financial management function in schools will rise.

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that because the school business manager is chiefly concerned with organizational management, the composition of the role tends to differ quite widely according to the size of the school. For example, in larger schools, typically those in the secondary sector, the business management function may be resourced with a team of staff members each with a narrower remit for different aspects of this function. Conversely, in smaller schools, typically those within the primary sector, the school business manager may be operating alone with minimal support, perhaps even on a part-time basis yet, because of this, have a broader level of responsibility (Woods *et al.*, 2010).

Though this paints a somewhat nuanced picture of school business management and the broad spectrum of roles and responsibilities held by members of this community, it is possible to identify some fundamental areas for which the typical incumbent of the role would be held accountable. These include the management of finances, human resources, information technology, facility and premises and health and safety. In addition, the school business manager is often the lead support staff member with line management responsibilities for these members of the staffing compliment (National Association of School Business Management, 2017a).

### **Social identity and school business managers**

The concept of identity originates from how and where an individual perceives of their position within a society, community or group (Tajfel, 1972). According to Giddens (1991), the pursuit of self-identity is fundamental to the development of individual agency. It is comprised of individuals' interactions and engagement with others as a means of cultivating and developing social structures and systems. The construction of self-identity is therefore comprised of both individual and social aspects which, in the context of working practice, relate to influences from ones professional and personal life, though the two need not and often do not crossover (Busher, 2005). Identity then is forged and shaped by an individual's narrative and experience (both personal and work-related) (Goodson, 1992) which in turn informs and influences their behaviour, motivations and personality (Hodgkinson, 1991). A key theory, fundamental to the development of knowledge in this area of the field, surrounds the notion of social identity, the origins of which can be found in the work of Henry Tajfel and his colleagues whose research into intergroup relations during the 1960s and 1970s provided the platform on which social identity theory was subsequently developed. In his own words, Tajfel (1972) defines social identity as "the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of the group membership" (p. 31). Identity is conceived of as a socially constructed phenomenon with a number of key features including the idea that individuals

define themselves according to the groups to which they belong thus identity is both shared with other group members and also provides the basis for collective social action (Tajfel, 1978). This represents more than a simple exercise in categorization related to the attributes and dispositions of a group, rather this sense of belongingness is a psychological state that influences and shapes how individuals behave and the means by which they perceive themselves and others (Hogg and Abrams, 1988). Social identity theory distinguishes between in groups and out groups whereby individuals assign themselves to groups (in groups) and differentiate themselves from groups to which they do not belong (out groups) in a three-stage process known as social categorization. The first stage is categorization whereby individuals assign people, including themselves, to particular categories as a means of making sense of the social world. Examples of such social categories might include things like gender, race, religious background or vocation. Assigning people to categories allows an individual to understand who they are and their role in society whilst knowing which categories they belong to also allows them to understand more about themselves. An individual can then begin to define their behaviour by referring to the norms of the groups to which they belong although this is only possible if they know who else belongs to their group. Individuals can belong to any number of groups. In the second phase, social identification, an individual begins to adopt the identity of the group to which they have assigned themselves to by behaving in ways they believe are consistent with other group members. This is where the sense of belongingness is forged as individuals develop an emotional or psychological attachment to the group. The final phase, social comparison, occurs when the individual feels secure in a group and begins to compare themselves with members of other groups. According to social identity theory, to maintain a sense of self-esteem a group needs to compare positively with other groups (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). In exploring the case of the school business manager, social identity theory is helpful because it provides a means of thinking about the maturity of this cohort in relation to their collective or group identity. Specifically, this paper focusses on career trajectory, qualifications and role composition as three social categories that provide an insight into the social identity of school business managers.

### The research

The empirical basis of this paper is drawn from data generated via a small-scale research project funded by the National Association of School Business Management[2] (NASBM) in England. The research was commissioned to provide an insight into the individuals occupying the school business manager role by exploring the means by which they became school business managers, their perceptions of the role and the extent to which they recognize themselves and are identified by others as a distinctive cohort of the school workforce. In line with these aims, the study was purposefully small-scale and both qualitative and exploratory in design with a focus on depth and interpretation (Mertens, 2005).

The participant sample was generated through a process of self-selection via an advertisement on the NASBM website that set out the aims of the research and invited interested members to volunteer to participate. There is a risk of bias associated with such a technique given the sample was generated from a population of respondents who had expressed an interest in participating rather than, for example, being selected at random (Olsen, 2008). Such bias is negated to some extent by two factors. First, the final sample of participants was selected on the basis of achieving variation according to a number of contextual factors (see below and Table I). Second, the aim of the study was to provide a snapshot of school business management practice in England through an in-depth insight into a small selection of individuals occupying the role.

Out of an initial 40 respondents to the original invitation to participate in the study, a total of 10 individuals were selected. This generated a sample that was large enough to

reflect a range of socio-economic, geographical and structural contexts and different phases of education without compromising the small-scale nature of the study. Represented within the sample were participants operating in both the primary and secondary school sector and one individual operating across a cross-phase school catering for students between the ages of 4–18. The sample included school business managers based in academies, district-authority-maintained schools, a grammar school (also district-maintained school but selective based on entrance examination) and an independent fee-paying school. These schools within the sample are situated in rural, suburban and inner city locales reflecting a range of socio-economic contexts. The size of school within which participants were located also differed across the sample.

Data were generated through a series of interviews with the participants that were semi-structured, to provide an optimal combination of flexibility and ability to adapt to the flow of the interview, while staying firmly within the parameters and aims of the study (Charmaz, 2001). The interview protocol was designed to explore the participants' career history, current role and notions of belongingness to and cohesion of the wider community of school business managers. Additional information was gathered including publically available school level data and national inspection reports to help build an accurate picture of the contexts within which each of the participants are situated.

In order to establish trustworthiness within the data, immediately after the interview a synopsis of the key points to emerge from the conversation was shared with each participant thus affording them the opportunity to correct any misinterpretations and offer further elaboration if they felt it necessary. In addition, the data generated were developed into ten mini-case study accounts. These were also shared with each participant to allow them to check their "account" provided a truthful and fair representation of their professional history and practice. Their comments and suggested amendments were addressed to increase the accuracy of the findings. Both of these member-checking procedures are common in qualitative inquiry as a means of ensuring and improving credibility of data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

All interviews were fully transcribed and subjected to a thematic analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994) whereby the key issues and patterns within the data were identified systematically through a processing of multi-level coding. The interview questions were used as an overarching frame against which higher-level codes were developed and mapped. The transcripts were then read carefully and relevant sections of text labeled with the corresponding codes before being subjected to further scrutiny to isolate additional meaningful sub-themes. These sub-themes were also labeled with lower-level codes. This resulted in the generation of three overarching categories relating to career trajectory, qualifications and composition of current role. Though the questions within the interview protocol did not directly address identity, the participants were encouraged to reflect on

Participant	Gender	Type	Phase	Type	Number of pupils	Locale
A	Male	Independent	Cross-phase	Independent	400	Suburban
B	Female	Maintained	Primary	Maintained	225	Inner city
C	Female	Academy	Secondary	Academy	1,200	Rural
D	Female	Academy	Primary	Academy	476	Suburban
E	Female	Academy	Secondary	Academy	1,700	Urban
F	Female	Maintained	Primary	Maintained	321	Suburban
G	Male	Maintained	Secondary	Maintained	1,200	Suburban
H	Female	Maintained	Primary	Maintained	280	Suburban
I	Female	Academy	Secondary	Academy	1,100	Suburban
J	Male	Grammar	Secondary	Grammar	800	Suburban

**Table I.**  
Participant  
information and  
school context

their personal and professional journeys to becoming a school business manager, the decisions they had taken along the way and their motivations for doing so whilst also considering how they (and others) perceived their current role in terms of status and recognition. Each of these issues speaks to a broader discourse surrounding identity and the factors or social categories that influence its formation and cohesion (Abrams and Hogg, 1990). In this respect, the notion of identity offers an appropriate and helpful lens through which to interrogate and interpret the data.

### **School business managers and identity negotiation**

In this section, the findings from the aforementioned project are discussed and interpreted through a social identity lens. In doing so, the following three social categories were identified as indicative of the cohesiveness, maturity and credibility of a shared identity amongst school business managers: career trajectory, qualifications and role composition. From a social identity perspective these categories are important because they provide a means by which school business managers distinguish themselves, identify with one another and compare their cohort with other groups (Abrams and Hogg, 1990). Each category is now discussed in turn.

#### *Career trajectories*

There is considerable diversity in terms of the vocational background of school business managers in this study with participants having entered the role via a range of different routes including educational administration and support, accountancy, banking, insurance, recruitment, higher education, district government, retail, police and the armed forces amongst those cited. Perhaps as a result of this range of prior occupations the participants have accumulated a broad range of skills and experiences that they have found to be transferable to their current role:

I started out doing insurance but ended up coming out of that, went to a loss adjusting company, then the council for five years, got bored [...] I'd been mentoring in a local school and a [school business manager] job came up in a school nearby where I lived, part-time, so I went for that and I got it. (Participant A)

While accounts such as this offer evidence of the vocational diversity that characterizes the career trajectories of many school business managers, they also suggest that school business management is not necessarily a first career choice but rather a role that individual's fall into:

I've been a business manager since 2000 and [...] really I came into the profession by accident. (Participant D)

It is telling that not a single participant set out to become a school business manager at the start of their career but came to inhabit the role by nature of circumstance rather than aspiration. This aligns with Woods (2014) assertion that many school business managers do not view their roles as lifelong projects and have often found themselves in the role by happenstance having previously worked in other sectors. However, the notion that many school business managers occupy a role to which they did not initially aspire shapes how they view that role and the wider school business management community. For example, a number of participants suggested that a lack of recognition and awareness of school business management is revealed in the fact that it remains a second (or third or fourth) career option for many individuals:

[What] I have found is that this tends to be a role that people do fall into, almost by accident, rather than something that people aspire to or leave school thinking this is the sort of profession they want to go into. (Participant H)

In the context of social identity formation, career trajectories are important to group cohesion. Groups of individuals that have trodden a broadly similar career path to their chosen role can draw on a shared experience and history that serves to strengthen their collective identity. Such shared experiences can be considered as social categories that are important features of social identity and help individuals to identify themselves as belonging to a particular group, identify with other members of that group and compare themselves to other groups (Hogg and Abrams, 1988). The varied and somewhat idiosyncratic career trajectories of the participants in this study coupled with little pre-existing ambition from members to occupy the school business manager role are in stark contrast to this and may therefore serve to weaken the notion of a shared identity amongst this community. Woods (2014) who suggests that this might be, in part at least, a consequence of the legacy of the part-time school secretary role in England that was, in many schools, the forerunner to the modern day school business manager and which was not necessarily viewed as a lifelong career project with all the accompanying expectations of professional training and development. While she suggests there are school business managers within the system that are extremely driven and career-oriented, she also points to a large proportion that is much less career-focussed.

#### *Qualifications*

While the findings indicate a lack of uniformity in relation to career trajectories of school business managers, discussions around qualifications suggest some homogeneity amongst participants. During the early phases of the governmental drive to professionalize members of the workforce involved in the financial and organizational management of schools, a suite of qualifications specific to school business management was established to facilitate the growth and evolution of the role (Woods, 2014). This suite comprised a certificate, diploma and advanced diploma in school business management and a higher level master's qualification in school business directorship at least one of which almost every participant in this study has completed. In addition, a number of participants have completed business management programmes in higher education or school specific financial and accountancy qualifications. In most cases, these qualifications have been undertaken as part of participants' in-service professional development and training:

I completed the certificate in school business management [...] that led me to a little bit of promotion in school where I became the office manager, I then did my diploma, and was given extra responsibility and then I had the opportunity to do either the advanced diploma or a tailored degree in Business Management, so I did the degree [...] and I was appointed to the leadership team. (Participant E)

Such qualifications strengthen the notion of a shared social identity amongst school business managers as they serve to validate the skills set and collective knowledge of this community and their claims as a cohort of the school workforce that is distinct from other groups such as teachers. From a social identity perspective, such qualifications serve as a social category that helps school business managers to define themselves and their unique skillset and also be identified by other school stakeholders:

When I joined my previous school one of the conditions at interview was whether I would be willing to undertake the certificate in school business management, which I was [...] I suppose that gave me a little bit of professional pride and actually it almost said "I've got something to show, I have been trained in this field now". (Participant B)

As Woods *et al.* (2012) remind us, a little over two decades ago the school business manager community did not really exist as a distinct cohort but rather a fragmented section of the wider school workforce with little in the way of a shared identity. Since then this group have

evolved quite considerably both in number and cohesion, one of the key drivers of which has been the increasingly qualified nature of their members. According to Abrams and Hogg (1990), social identity is constructed and strengthened through such processes whereby subordinate groups may attempt to widen their territory within an organization or sector and build recognition and credibility with more dominant groups. In an educational sector traditionally led and dominated by trained educationalists, many school business managers have often found this to be a difficult space in which to establish their position:

I've got to say when I first came to work in education that I felt that educationalists believed they were the only professional people on earth! But it's about building up respect and credibility isn't it? And then people learn that you need to have a qualification for what you do or actually you need to have several qualifications. (Participant I)

As this participant explains, such school business management-specific qualifications provide them with recognition for their work and the role they play in the wider ecosystem of the school. This serves to strengthen their identity.

However, the findings also highlight concerns around the perceived value of such qualifications, concerns that appear to stem directly from the systemic changes within the English school system, particularly the academies program, as Woods (2014) explains: "unlike the financial system used in schools managed by local authorities, academies employ a business accounting model" whereby the government drive for systemic academisation is "having an impact on the [school business management] qualifications in the labour market and in the status they confer" (p. 103). Indeed, a number of participants in this study expressed their frustration and anxiety that the qualifications they had worked so hard to obtain might no longer be fit for purpose and rendered obsolete in a school system that seems to be changing too fast for their cohort to keep pace with:

When I came into this job it was all pushing the school business management qualifications, so I'm working my way through them, I'm at advanced diploma level at the moment [...] but then when I finish that I'm going to have to now revisit doing accountancy because it's becoming more and more obvious that that's something you're going to need. (Participant H)

In the same way that these qualifications serve to strengthen the social identity of school business managers providing them with status and credibility as a distinct cohort of the school workforce so the devaluation of such qualifications weakens this shared identity. Indeed, as Tajfel (1982) argues, for low status groups such as school business managers: "the strength drawn by its members from its internal and positive social identity may come into conflict with negative evaluations from 'outside'" (p. 11). In this respect, the school business management community has a challenge on its hands in adapting to a future job market where their specific qualifications may no longer hold the same currency. As the previous quote suggests, this poses a dilemma for members of this cohort as to whether or not to pursue further qualifications and professional development to keep pace with the ongoing structural changes within the school system.

#### *Role composition*

Generally speaking the responsibilities associated with the school business manager role tend to be categorized as financial, organizational and resource management. While such a generalization is not entirely inaccurate, in relation to role composition, the findings of this study suggest a more nuanced reality:

If there is a blocked drain and the supervisor isn't on site [...] that will be me. If there's an IT [...] issue and the IT technician isn't here I will go and sort that out, but that's just day to day, my actual role encompasses the full gambit of business management in schools. I am finance, I am human resources, I am premises [...]. (Participant A)



In this respect the school business manager is a kind of chief problem solver in the school and the individual to whom people turn when they encounter an issue that is not directly related to teaching and learning. This is consistent with one of the earliest texts to focus on the then emergent practice of school business management, in which O'Sullivan *et al.* (2000) describes the school business manager as "the 'fixer' in a turbulent sea of problems and issues" (p. 43). Nearly 20 years on from this assertion, the size and scale of the operation within many schools and the growing volume of organizational responsibility and management associated with the decline of the district authority in England, has led to a growing sense that the school business manager role has almost become boundaryless in its composition:

The actual duties of my job are constantly evolving [...] every day is different; you can't predict what you're going to be asked to do anymore. (Participant H)

There are a number of factors that influence the composition of the school business manager role, perhaps most notably the size of the school in which the incumbent operates with larger schools (usually those in the secondary school sector) requiring more organizational management capacity than smaller schools (usually those in the primary sector). While it is therefore possible to make some distinction between the specifics of the role according to the phase of schooling in which an individual operates, it is perhaps more meaningful to do so according to the size of the school and the structure within which it is situated. For instance, the school business management function within a large primary school or a cluster of primary schools may be similar to that of a small- to medium-sized secondary school. Similarly, whether or not the school is maintained by the district authority or has converted to academy status can also have a significant influence on the school business manager role. Those schools that remain under district authority control can still expect a level of organizational support, particularly for the management of their budgets whereas academies take responsibility and autonomy for their finances. As highlighted earlier, in the case of some MATs, this may take the form of a centralized finance function similar to the model employed by district authority whereas in other academies, maybe those in smaller MATs or standalone SATs, this function has become school-based with significant implications for the school business manager, as this participant explains:

The job is totally different whether you're in an academy or not. When you're not an academy you've got the backing of the local authority the whole time so they're practically doing your finances for you, they're checking it, you're just sending in a monitoring report. When you become an academy you are the company secretary, you are holding the reins of multi-million pounds of funding and you are doing the management accounts. You're running a business in effect. (Participant C)

While this individual's role has clearly changed as a result of the conversion to academy status, for those school business managers working in academies with centralized finance systems their roles have remained largely unchanged and will likely bear similarities to their counterparts in the large number of schools within the English system that remain under the management of the district authority. The landscape is therefore complex though the findings from this study seem to support the claim made by Woods (2014) that the structural reforms that have swept through the English school system in recent years have certainly changed what it means to be a school business manager for many incumbents of the role.

### Implications

This paper has highlighted a number of challenges, opportunities and dilemmas for school business managers, which when interpreted through a social identity lens provide some useful insight into the members of this cohort of the school workforce and the factors that influence their role. In particular, the influence of recent structural reforms in England on

the space inhabited by school business managers, the degree to which this space is being stretched to accommodate new actors from other sectors and the extent to which the school business manager community is prepared and able to mobilize and adapt to this new environment. Since the school business manager role emerged in England nearly two decades ago, the community has undoubtedly developed and grown in capacity gaining recognition within the school system and advocacy from successive government administrations in England. These are positive indicators of a collective and cohesive identity amongst the school business management community, an impressive achievement for a cohort of the school workforce that remains in relative infancy. However, as the findings presented in this paper have also identified, this cohort currently faces threats to its shared identity. These include the complacency of their own membership many of which lack the motivation to develop their skills and knowledge and still view the role as a second or third career option. This issue has been compounded by the increasing demand particularly within MATs for finance staff with higher level qualifications over and above those specific to school business management leading to actors from the business, commerce and finance sector beginning to occupy these new spaces. Yet for those school business managers with the will and capability to adapt to these changes there will almost certainly be opportunities for professional development and career progression. Indeed, there is a growing number of appropriately and highly qualified school business managers operating within this sphere though their numbers remain low. For school systems such as England's that are actively pursuing decentralization there are implications for how the organizational and financial management function is resourced. In one respect there exists a sensible argument for bringing in actors from other sectors with the skills to support schools as they move to a more financially and organizationally autonomous model. However, it would also seem logical to build capacity within school business management community so that this collective acumen is not lost and more of their members are equipped and motivated to support a self-managed school system. In due course, a combination of both scenarios may play out whereby a fragmentation of the school business manager role may be necessary through the evolution of a narrower sub-set of specialist positions, particularly in the larger schools and multi-school organizations, with responsibility for finance, operations, premises and other areas of the business management function. Though this would help address some of the issues reported here surrounding the boundaryless nature of the role it would also change what it means to identify as a school business manager.

## Notes

1. Local or district authorities in the English context are local government structures with responsibility for a range of services across the geographical area they represent. Such services include health, social care and education. There are 152 local authorities in England. Traditionally they have been responsible for managing the schools in their areas. However, the significant increase in academy schools across the English system in recent years has coincided with a reduction in the capacity and resource of this tier of government in some areas of the country. One of the key features of academy schools is that they are not maintained by and therefore operate independently of the local authority.
2. The NASBM is an apolitical trade association representing school business managers and other members of the school workforce involved in organizational and financial management and administration in England. They are committed to providing government with a balanced stakeholder perspective, representing the broad interests of all of their members and support and develop a fit for purpose professional workforce equipped to effectively manage diverse school operations. The NASBM currently has 2,821 members (National Association of School Business Management, 2017b).

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