



Evaluating the impact of leadership development: a case study

Impact of leadership development

609

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Abstract

Purpose – The relevance of business education is coming under increasing challenge from many quarters, who argue that business schools are not delivering research and programmes that are relevant to the needs of business and society. The purpose of this paper is to test these claims by evaluating the impact of a leadership development programme on middle managers within a city council organisation.

Design/methodology/approach – A qualitative methodology was employed within an evaluative research approach. Interviews were held with 32 line managers of the Leading Managers (delegates on the programme). A thematic analysis was undertaken using categories of “knowledge”, “skills” and “attributes”. Key stories were also collected as “vignettes” to illuminate where the line manager had considered the impact of the programme to have been particularly significant to their department or to the organisation as a whole.

Findings – The research was able to identify how the programme had benefited those managers who had taken part on the programme, and how the programme had positively impacted on the organisation as a whole.

Research limitations/implications – The paper counters the claims that business schools and business education have little impact at organisational level. The paper provides evidence to support the value and relevance of training and development within the workplace.

Originality/value – There is little hard evidence available highlighting the impact of management education on organisations. This paper provides such evidence.

Keywords Case studies, Leadership, Management development

Paper type Case study

Introduction

The relevance of business education is coming under increasing challenge from many quarters. Authors such as Pfeffer and Fong (2002), Mintzberg (2004) and Bennis and O’Toole (2005) all argue that business schools are not delivering research and programmes that are relevant to the needs of business and society. Indeed, a recent Advanced Institute of Management (AIM) Report (Advanced Institute of Management, 2006, p. 7) summarised the typical arguments in terms of:

- business school research is too abstract and irrelevant to the needs of practising managers;
- business school teaching is too theoretical and not sufficiently focused on problems that managers actually face;



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- MBAs and business degrees generally do not produce well rounded managers with leadership qualities; and
- business education has made almost no impression on practising managers and has failed to impact on business performance.

The purpose of this paper is to test these propositions by evaluating the impact of a leadership development programme on middle managers within a city council organisation. Firm evidence existed from student feedback regarding their views of the usefulness of the business education at an individual level. This project was designed to evaluate the extent to which the programme was making a difference at organisational level.

Derby City Council, after drawing up a Leadership Charter in 1999, decided to focus its leadership development activity on its population of middle managers. Working in partnership with the Derbyshire Business School (DBS), a postgraduate certificate programme entitled “The Leading Manager” was designed to meet this development need. The programme is now in its seventh year (2006-2007) and has created a critical mass of “Leading Managers” within the Council. The programme team works closely with the students, the training manager and other senior managers at Derby City Council to ensure that the programme continues to meet individual and organisational needs. Whilst it is acknowledged that it is difficult to evaluate the impact of management development programmes (Burgoyne, 2004), results from this project indicate that there are identifiable benefits to the participants, their teams, Derby City Council and other stakeholders.

This paper is structured in a number of sections. The following section briefly reviews contemporary literature on leadership, management development and evaluation research. The next section provides information regarding the programme’s development, context and content. The following section outlines details of the evaluation research project and its findings, while the final section of the paper concludes with a consideration of the implications for middle manager development programmes.

Leadership, management development and evaluation research

Burgoyne threw out a challenge at the 2004 Institute of Leadership and Management conference, themed “People at the Heart of Leadership”. He asserted that investment in management training and development should become more “evidence-based rather than faith-based” (Reade and Thomas, 2004). He was thereby echoing concerns voiced by the Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership (2002), whose research suggested that there were no credible measures to provide links between the supply of management training and development, and better business management and improved performance. While many managers believe that there are benefits at organisational level, few have been able to demonstrate or measure them in practice (Otter *et al.*, 2004). Some describe the search for evidence as one for “the holy grail” (e.g. Becker *et al.*, 2001), which further extends the “faith” metaphor, to suggest there may be some tangible benefits, if only we knew where to search. However, the lack of evidence has not deterred organisations from investing in such training, with, according to *Personnel Today* (Reade and Thomas, 2004), an estimated £34 billion spent globally by organisations on leadership development.

Whether and how to measure such returns on investments is subject to debate, and one to which the paper will return. However, there is a general consensus regarding the need for leadership development. Research by the Chartered Management Institute (2001) indicated that the quality of leadership in UK organisations is lacking. Over a third of all managers in their survey of 1,500 practising managers (and almost half of junior managers surveyed) rate the quality of leadership in their organisations as “poor”, with managers in the public sector receiving the lowest ratings. The same research acknowledged that the quality of leadership was likely to be higher in those organisations that have a clear and systematic approach to leadership development.

Leadership in the public sector has received increased attention in recent years, in an era where accountability and performance management have become key features of new public management (Pollitt, 2003; Reed, 2003). Leadership capacity is an integral part of the Comprehensive Performance Review strategy in the UK, the system in place to assess the performance of local councils. To support councils in the process of leadership development, the Improvement and Development Agency highlighted five competencies considered to be crucial in leading public sector organisations. These are:

- (1) vision for the community and strategy;
- (2) change management;
- (3) motivation;
- (4) innovation and creativity; and
- (5) alliance-building.

Joyce (2004) argues that there has been little systematic research into leadership in local government, especially into the role of leaders in turning round failing councils. His research (albeit with the focus only at Chief Executive level) suggested that “effective leaders also manage” and are “not detached from everyday realities” (Joyce, 2004, p. 242). The need for a blend of leadership and management skills, and the importance of attention to the realities of the workplace, align with findings into what makes good management and leadership development programmes. The CEML Report (Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership, 2002), and the UK Quality Assurance Agency (2002) have emphasised employers’ demands for training and development to have *relevance to the workplace*, in terms of knowledge, skills and personal attributes. Cunningham *et al.* (2004) propose that many classroom-structured programmes of management development do not enhance learning, mainly due to the lack of linkage with work-based learning. The Local Government Employer Association (Agbalaya, 2004) emphasise that the value of management development activities lies in their relevance to the workplace, with local needs being paramount.

Literature on the transfer of learning to the workplace (Thackwray, 1997; Hamel, 1991), knowledge management (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995) and learning organisations (Argyris and Schön, 1978; Senge, 1970) have mainly focused on private sector, profit-based organisations, where “successful” learning interventions are often assumed to be performance- and profit-related. Hartley *et al.* (2002, p. 399) point out that the “goals for public service organizations, including local government, are often ambiguous, contradictory and subject to contestation through the political process”. The complexity of the local government context further obfuscates the

concept of “effectiveness” of the transfer of learning, as there will be multiple, again sometimes contradictory, stakeholder perspectives.

Works by Currie (1998) and Blackler and Kennedy (2004) both include a public sector dimension to management learning. Currie’s paper, using a processual approach (Pettigrew, 1987) to examining management development and cultural change in the NHS, highlights an example of middle management development which was perceived to have failed, mainly because the competency-based approach was seen as inappropriate in both content and process in that particular context. Blackler and Kennedy’s (2004) work focuses on Chief Executive level, but concludes that the success of the programme relates to the action learning methodology employed and the way in which this contributed as a “powerful learning experience” for individual development at particularly stressful times. They further draw attention to the paucity of research on leadership development in the public sector generally.

Design of leadership development programmes is the focus of Cacioppe’s (1998) study, where he argues for reshaping mindsets and improving abilities, skills and relationships through action learning, reflection and team projects. Allio (2005) considers that leadership can only be learned, not taught, but he tends to use a narrow view of “teaching” which fails to recognise the roles of a range of pedagogic methods that can develop certain skills and attributes beyond the teaching of specific knowledge components (e.g. action learning, problem-based and enquiry-based learning). He argues that there is “little evidence that any course or program produces better leaders” (Allio, 2005, p. 1071).

Whether, why and how such leadership and management training and development should be evaluated is then open to discussion. Thackwray (1997, p. 3) posed the question “Is staff development of value?” followed by an assumption that “If it is, then it can – and must – be evaluated”. The Cabinet Office (2006) document “Evaluating the impact of leadership development: an evaluation framework” provided a strong rationale for evaluation, which includes those of accountability and identifying areas for improvement. Beaton and Richards (1998) identify two key considerations in the decision whether to evaluate training and development activities. They claim that the greater the percentage of an organisation’s personnel involved in the learning activity, the wider the message from the activity will be spread, and therefore there is a more pressing need to check that the messages being spread are the ones intended. Secondly, the greater the activity’s likely impact on the organisation in terms of critical business processes, again the greater the need to evaluate the impact of the activity. Both these elements were considered to be present in the case study in question.

However, how to evaluate still remains a contentious issue. Thackwray (1997) claims that few organisations can actually demonstrate in practice the value of the investment in training, while others have suggested techniques for measuring return on investment (RoI) as the answer. Kakabadse (2004; cited in Reade and Thomas, 2004) rejects this approach. He argues that financial measures are the worst measures to be applied to a leadership course evaluation. He suggests that one should measure changes in behaviour and attitude, and that this requires taking a mid- to long-term view to identify opportunities created by the learning intervention.

Models for evaluating the use of learning in general, rather than specific to management development, are mainly based on the work by Kirkpatrick (1959). He proposed a four-level hierarchical model, representing reaction, learning, behaviour

and results. Other models concentrate on reaction, learning, transfer of learning and the effects on the department (e.g. Thackwray, 1997). The literature suggests that it is generally more difficult to provide a meaningful analysis of the impact of learning where programmes focus on softer-skills, including people-management and leadership.

Context and content of the Leading Manager programme

In 1999, Derby City Council established its Leadership Charter, based on seven key areas in which managers should demonstrate effective leadership. The Charter requires that managers:

- provide vision and direction;
- manage performance;
- plan and review activities;
- develop people;
- develop themselves;
- communicate effectively; and
- demonstrate integrity and commitment.

An Organisational Development Task Group recommended a series of initiatives to keep leadership high on the Council agenda, including senior manager coaching, annual Leadership Conferences and an in-house publication, entitled “The Leading Manager”. It further decided to set up a tailored middle manager development programme, to be based on the Charter principles.

The Leading Manager programme is now in its seventh year, and is well established, with well over 70 Leading Managers in the Council having completed the programme. This represents about one in five of the middle management level, and is seen as reaching a critical mass in making a difference to the Council’s leadership agenda.

Student-centredness and action learning (Bonwell and Eison, 1991) are core principles informing the teaching and learning strategy for the programme. All theoretical input is related to practice, through the giving of examples and by building in frequent opportunities for discussion, debate and reflection. Using practical “real world” examples and discussing applicability, integration and transferability of models helps to make the teaching and learning “more sexy and exciting” (Ottewill and Macfarlane, 2003, p. 36). Guest speakers are used extensively to allow learning from role models (Cacioppe, 1998). Reflexivity is recognised as an integral component for successful learning and for managing oneself and others (Van Woerkom *et al.*, 2002; Dexter, 2003; Cunningham *et al.*, 2004). The programme also offers a safe space for exploration of ideas (Benington and Hartley, 2003).

The Postgraduate Certificate in Management comprises six ten-credit modules (subsequently amalgamated into four 15-credit modules) and runs throughout the academic year from September to June, with a review day the following September. During the Induction Day, a 360-degree diagnostic exercise is introduced. Feedback is analysed by a Chartered Occupational Psychologist and one-to-one interviews are conducted to discuss the findings and implications, and to discuss early action

planning for personal development. Feedback from participants indicates that, conducted professionally, this exercise is extremely valuable, as it gives a personal focus to the course.

Three of the modules (i.e. half the programme content) strongly focus on people skills, with the emphasis on leadership, self-management and managing others. Classical and emerging theories are introduced, especially around the concept of leadership, which has received increased attention in the public sector (e.g. Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership, The NHS Leadership Framework). Contingency and situational leadership styles are advocated (e.g. Blanchard *et al.*, 1994), while newer theories, for example, on servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1998) and transformational leadership (Yukl, 1998) are also discussed.

Participants are encouraged to become reflective learners (Taylor and White, 2000), continually assessing their strengths and weaknesses and partly assessed by completion of a learning log. The log is completed throughout the year and includes reflections on how they have been able to use the learning experience of each module, and the programme as a whole. Examples of application of theory to real workplace activities are included, together with an analysis of the value and implications of developed or developing personal skills and the attributes involved.

Interspersed between the three “softer-skills” modules are two on operational and quality management and one on public sector management. The operational and quality modules help the managers to understand the processes whereby people, capital, materials and equipment are combined to produce goods and services. Private sector models of management are incorporated, to open up debate about the transferability of process models from the private to the public sector, as advocated by Gershon (2004). An emphasis on quality improvement and working to excellence align with the Council’s aim of gaining Excellence status. These modules are assessed through an examination and through coursework, the latter based on a presentation to the senior and line managers of both the Council and the Business School, following a residential event. During the three-day residential, the Leading Managers address a challenge set for them by the Council and have to make recommendations for improvement, with justifications and implementation plans. Current Leading Managers at the Council recognise the value of these modules and report that “the tools and skills [...] have helped to help colleagues reflect on process, to understand flow and appreciate the importance of really looking at the type of operation you are aiming for”.

Evaluation of the programme has been undertaken by both the Business School and the City Council. The School has its own quality assurance procedures, with programme and module evaluation forms, to inform continuous improvement. City Council evaluation of the programme has also been undertaken, focusing on responses from participating managers.

Research methodology

A qualitative methodology was employed within an evaluative research approach, which Patton (2002) equates to a quality assurance process. Patton highlights the importance of “understand(ing) the stories behind the numbers” (p. 152), with words being able to provide the richness and depth that quantitative research often lacks. The

“stories” were elicited from two main sources, namely the Leading Managers and their line managers.

Findings from the learning logs, completed by Leading Managers throughout the programme, gave examples of where the students considered that they had applied their learning (or not) to the workplace. As the logs were regularly completed throughout the programme, this enabled the reaction, learning and transfer of learning (Thackwray, 1997) to be identified and assessed. To a limited extent, the logs also gave some indication of the wider effects on the department (Thackwray’s fourth component for assessment). While appreciating that the logs were completed for a different purpose, namely the module coursework, the students had to provide sufficient evidence of the examples of adopting and adapting their learning to the work environment, to enable the team to have confidence in the data.

Interviews were held with the line managers of 32 of the Leading Managers from the first three cohorts. The Cabinet Office (2006) evaluation report considers feedback from line managers as a source of evidence for the evaluation of the effectiveness of leadership development. Only three of the line managers approached were unable to be interviewed, due to practical constraints. Some students had not completed the programme (although the non-completion rate is low) or left the Council and were excluded from the research.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to elicit stories regarding how the Leading Manager programme might have made an impact at organisational level, rather than solely at individual level. Interviews lasted between 25 and 50 minutes. Interview and ethics protocols were followed. Questions were phrased initially to check the line managers’ understanding of the programme and content. Examples were then elicited of where the line manager perceived the learning to have been transferred to specific workplace situations. These situations were then explored in depth to ascertain what the line manager considered the Leading Manager was doing differently – how behaviours, knowledge, skills and personal attributes had changed. A challenging approach was taken at times by the interviewer, both to test the line managers’ understanding and to explore why they believed it was the programme that had caused or contributed to the development. Questions included a request for justifying the cost of sending another candidate onto the programme. Where possible, supplementary documentary evidence (e.g. copies of business plans) was obtained to corroborate examples given.

Using just one interviewer ensured a consistency in approach. Knowing that “the quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer” (Patton, 2002, p. 341), it was important that both the interview technique and the interview data were analysed early in the data collection and analysis process (McCracken, 1988). This was done by the other three members of the research team listening to the tapes and reviewing the process and content, following completion of the first interview. The three all listened separately to the same tape and compared their analyses. These were also checked against the notes made by the original interviewer. Two of the three researchers completed a similar exercise with the second and third interviews. Confidence in the process was thereby confirmed and further interviews conducted.

A thematic analysis (King, 1998) was undertaken. King advocates using themes both from the literature and allowing emergent themes to be incorporated. Initial

themes were based on categories of “knowledge”, “skills” and “attributes” (Bunning, 1992; cited in Lincoln, 2003), relating to the attributed element of the changed behaviour. Within each category were various sub-headings, reflecting different aspects of each, based on the emergent data. Comprehensive summaries of these key findings are presented in Tables I-III. Key stories were also collected as “vignettes” to illuminate where the line manager had considered the impact of the programme to have been particularly significant to their department (Thackwray, 1997), or to the organisation as a whole. These vignettes were clustered by impact type, and a selection of these is presented in the following section. Findings were discussed with the City Council Chief Officers and training department. No subsequent changes were made to the analyses as a result of this check.

Findings: how management and leadership development has made an impact on Derby City Council

Of the 22 line managers interviewed (some of which line-managed more than one Leading Manager), the majority (17) could identify individual and organisational benefits that they perceived the programme had delivered. Four categories of organisational benefits are now presented, each drawing on knowledge, skills and attribute development from The Leading Manager programme. The four are:

- (1) contribution to better processes and project management;
- (2) more effective team-working;
- (3) developing networks and collaborative working; and
- (4) improved self-management.

Contribution to better processes and project management

Examples were given of Leading Managers being able to plan, initiate and follow through processes and projects more effectively. The knowledge base had been extended from all the modules of the programme, but especially from the operations and quality-based modules, where different theoretical models, including operational tools and techniques are taught. Throughout the programme, skills and attributes had been developed, notably in communication skills, target-setting, enhanced cognitive skills, the ability to take a corporate view, a customer-service focus and enthusing others.

Thomas was a member of the second cohort of Leading Managers. His line manager, Graham, particularly noticed the increase in confidence in Thomas as the programme progressed. He explained, “Thomas has found this useful at an individual level . . . but it also translated into an organisational benefit” in that Graham, and others in the organisation, now have more confidence themselves in Thomas and can give him more responsibilities. Thomas’ enhanced confidence meant that Graham believed him to be capable of managing more people – “2 or 3 teams”. Graham also felt able to ask Thomas to build on his new knowledge of “the wider, corporate picture”, by managing a project to review the section’s processes and to develop and write the Business Plan. This has made a significant difference, Graham said, by “improving our performance . . . with SMART targets”. He is confident that “his knowledge and skills, directly as a result of The Leading Manager programme” have helped Thomas set the targets, as well as identifying savings of “hundreds of thousands of pounds”.

Type	Individual effect	Organisational impact (actual/ potential)
A. Managing self/managing others/leadership	<p>Increased theoretical foundation on which to base management and leadership behaviours</p> <p>Deeper understanding of implication of actions and decisions</p> <p>Specific reference made to time management/focus and priorities/team building/decision-making/consultation/performance management/developing self and others/360-degree feedback</p>	<p>Better-educated and more effective managers/leaders</p> <p>Improved management styles, leading to team efficiencies and greater effectiveness (e.g. trying out new ways of working, based on management theory)</p> <p>Gains for LM line managers (e.g. less time spent in managing LM as time-management principles utilised in practice)</p> <p>Possibility of only short-term impact, unless reinforced</p>
B. Systems/processes/quality/customer focus	<p>Increased theoretical foundation on which to base management and leadership behaviours, especially in planning and reviewing activities</p> <p>Deeper understanding of implication of actions and decisions</p> <p>Specific reference made to planning/processes/customers/making sense of whole systems and outcomes</p>	<p>Better-educated and more effective managers/leaders</p> <p>Introduction of new ways of working (e.g. in managing review processes)</p> <p>Gains in process of production of corporate/section documents (e.g. business plans)</p> <p>More focus on quality and customer</p> <p>Better project management</p> <p>Better-educated and more effective managers/leaders</p> <p>Increased knowledge base of LMs, leading to enhanced ability to provide vision and direction at section and corporate level</p>
C. Public sector context/Derby City Council/strategy/collaborative working/culture	<p>Increased theoretical foundation on which to base management and leadership behaviours, especially in understanding of the wider context and corporate view</p> <p>Deeper understanding of implication of actions and decisions, constraints and opportunities</p> <p>Specific reference made to: understanding basis of certain corporate decisions/seeing the "why"/provision of framework for analyses to inform action</p>	<p>Analytical and informed approach to stakeholder management, collaborative working, managing partnerships</p>

Table I.
Organisational impact from development of knowledge

Table II.
Organisational impact
from development of
attributes

Type	Individual effect	Organisational impact (actual/potential)
A. Confidence	<p>Self-efficacy Better interpersonal skills Learning-directed behaviour Higher levels of motivation and energy</p>	<p>Increased self-efficacy and confidence of leader positively affects other staff and organisational performance More motivated and energised leaders create a better working environment Career development potential (note: this might be outside current workplace) More rounded managers LMs as seeing the wider picture and implications of actions Career development potential (note: this might be outside current workplace)</p>
B. Reflection	<p>Deeper learning "Know thyself" Better career and self-management Higher levels of emotional intelligence</p>	<p>More motivated and energised leaders create a better working environment LMs with drive to initiate, lead and see projects through LMs with an interest in and aptitude to embrace change agenda LMs' attitude in line with new public management/DeA/CPA expectations</p>
C. Enthusiasm and commitment	<p>Enhanced commitment to Derby City Council and customers (but needs to be harnessed, or leads to frustrations) Better motivated</p>	<p>Enhanced performance, driven by customer focus Greater awareness enables managers to better understand the context in which they are working and to make more informed decisions Better management of staff</p>
D. Customer-focus (outer-directed)	<p>Commitment to others Commitment to quality</p>	
E. Heightened awareness/broader perspective	<p>More holistic view Make sense of the "bigger picture" Greater empathy</p>	

Type	Individual effect	Organisational impact (actual/potential)
A. Conceptual	More analytical approach Reflective Considering alternatives and implications	LMs who think before they act, therefore saving other staff time in remedying decisions Higher-level skills of LMs, improving potential growth of staff team and aiding succession-planning Ability of LMs to adopt private sector Better project management Improved business planning processes Professional dissemination of information to internal and external audience
B. Technical	Systems approach to managing activities Better problem-solving and decision-making Presentational skills	Better communications Enhanced performance management Better working relationships with trade unions Contributing towards a move to a culture of trust Gains for working teams, through clarity in instructions, clear setting of SMART goals, team exercises
C. Interpersonal	Enhanced communications skills; specific reference made to listening/negotiating/liaising/asking questions/challenging Better management of meetings Team-building and maintenance skills Leadership and management skills (e.g. better delegation) More networking within Derby City Council and with new partners	Evidence of increased morale LMs as enthused and energised, which affects working colleagues Win-win approach reduces potential conflict Challenging line manager decisions ensures other managers are forced to think through/justify decisions Using I&DeA models of good practice in leadership behaviour (e.g. MBWA) Building links for multi-agency partnerships, in line with good practice (ref.: CPA reports) Shared use of management language/better understanding of processes LMs as presenting solutions rather than problems, thereby saving others' time LM autonomy in working practices releases their line manager time/focus Learning culture, enhancing growth of staff
D. Personal	Self-management Learning and development Reflection and commitment to personal growth	

Table III.
Organisational impact from development of skills

From Table I, this example mainly draws on learning from row B, with clear linkages to project management and process techniques. The customer focus (Table II, row D) and technical skills development (Table III, row B) are also exemplified here.

More effective team-working

With leadership as the focus of the programme, helping the students to become more effective team or section leaders is a key aim of the teaching and learning strategy. Enhanced knowledge, skills and attributes all contribute to fulfilment of this, again from across all the modules, but predominantly from the people-skills modules and the first residential. Team leadership style has direct effects on the performance levels of the team as a whole, especially during periods of change, with relationships being a crucial aspect, according to research by Tierney (1999).

This category provided numerous examples of beneficial changes, two of which are illustrated below.

Philip's manager, Roy, had no doubts regarding the benefits of the programme for Philip and his team. He described the course as "a real success in Philip's case ... he's grabbed hold of strategic thinking, and the tools that were offered throughout the programme" and used them to good effect. He had produced, and used, a solid business plan, far superior to the other team leaders in Roy's section who had not had the benefit of the programme. Philip's results won accolade in the local press, as his team had significantly increased revenues and generated a profit for the Council. His supportive style was illustrated by his message to all the team that he could not claim the success personally, as he knew it was a team effort. This reflected his management style and his understanding of taught models of "turning the pyramid upside down" (Blanchard *et al.*, 1994). Roy explained, "everybody in their Business Plan has to produce an organisational chart and Philip's was upside down, deliberately, the inverted pyramid, and I thought 'Ah, yes, right, he's got that from the course, and it's not just an empty gesture; he has talked it through with me and he's taken on board what it really means, about us all supporting the folk who are doing the real work. I think that's a lovely example and nobody else has done it. ... I know it's only a piece of paper, but I know in Philip's case, it's a real cultural shift as well".

The importance of good communications with the team was recognised by Andy, when he was completing the course, according to his line manager, Tim. Tim believes that Andy always lacked confidence, was previously indecisive and "that spread through his team" and he always felt the need to "seek approval". His 360° diagnostic feedback helped him to realise that he was valued by his team and felt that he could make the right decisions, whilst also "thinking about others and ... empowering people". He introduced regular team meetings – "they were infrequent – now he's realised the need to communicate, he's behaved differently; we'll have one every month". Andy has become more involved with training, using and cascading his knowledge from the programme, e.g. on quality systems and customer-focus, that has "enabled us as a group and them as a team to do all that work stress-free". Some of the specific training and development activities undertaken on the programme, e.g. on giving and receiving feedback, have been used by Andy in his own team training events.

These two vignettes show learning in all three of Bunning's categories. From Table I (Knowledge), both Leading Managers had evidently gained from the "people-based" modules (Table I, row A) and there is also reference in Andy's case of the quality-systems knowledge (Table I, row B). Development of personal attributes include confidence (Table II, row A) and customer focus (Table II, row D) and the examples also make reference to better communications (skills, Table III, row B).

Developing networks and collaborative working

Confidence was seen as a key factor in new Leading Managers breaking out of their comfortable working circles and creating or expanding networks. Collaborative working is becoming increasingly valued in the public sector (Pollitt, 2003; Dexter, 2004a, b) and theoretical models and associated skills are covered in the programme.

Sue's manager, Linda, thought that the programme had "made loads of differences" and had a "massive impact", and led to saving "loads of money" whilst acknowledging that these were only her perceptions and that any effects were difficult to measure. Examples of differences at individual level included Sue becoming "very excited, very articulate and willing to push the boat out". The course gave her confidence and the ability to nurture a sound team spirit, at the same time as challenging and raising questions at all levels. Linda believes Sue, together with another Leading Manager student, Robert, had produced their "Area Panel Good Practice Guide", specifically drawing on knowledge and skills from the programme. She said others in her team are "so impressed by what they have learned on the programme that they want to go on it". Sue was considered as "fundamental" to the success of the Service Access Review, linked to the Council's Customer Service Strategy. "She was able to influence people . . . she was persistent . . . strategically, negotiated the connections and kept the process moving." "I don't think that this persistence would have been so apparent," said Linda, "if Robert and Sue . . . had not been on the course and constantly kept reminding us that we need to make these links . . . heaps of strategic links with the partnerships".

Increased confidence (Table II, row A) won through participation in the programme was a common benefit that line managers saw as then contributing significantly to a range of managerial and leadership activities. In the above examples, Sue especially had increased confidence and that had led to her building and using networks, with advantages for the team and for service users. This was regarded as drawing on new knowledge for understanding and developing collaborative working (Table I, row A). Both Leading Managers in this vignette had learned to take a broader perspective (Table II, row E) and showed enhanced interpersonal and personal skills (Table II, rows C and D).

Improved self-management

Creating learning, more autonomous, Leading Managers has obvious benefits for the individual, but also rewards investment at organisational level due to their impact on their own and others' performance. Previous vignettes have included reference to increased confidence and autonomy of the Leading Managers, with their line managers appreciating how it has freed up their time and enabled them to become more focused on work more appropriate to their level. Trevor's experience illustrates this.

Trevor's manager, Don, had also been on the programme and believes that "those initiatives, those ideas, those ways of working have been built upon and grow into the culture . . . making sure we manage ourselves and manage others". Don stated that Trevor is now much better at managing his own time, having more focus and being better able to prioritise. He can manage any pressure better, but also recognise if the pressure is too much – something that Don says is "a massive benefit to me". He handles crises in a "more sensible and dignified way . . . the course gave him the strength to do that". Trevor is more reflective and self-critical, which has led to an improvement in relationships. Don believes this leads to organisational benefits, too, as "anything which makes people communicate better . . . means it simplifies processes; there's less conflict than there was before and there's less confusion about people's positions and attitudes – more clarity there". As evidence, Don gave an example of Trevor now

accepting responsibility for a capital monitoring programme, which has saved a lot of Don's time – "It's benefited me dramatically – I don't need to know all the details".

The advances in self-management mainly derive from the first module and reflect learning categorised in row A of Table I, rows A, B, C and E of Table II, and rows A, C and D of Table III.

Summary and consideration of implications

The research has produced some compelling evidence of how the Leading Manager programme has contributed not only to individual development, but also directly to organisational improvement. It also provides useful evidence to refute the arguments put forward in the Advanced Institute of Management (2006) report referred to earlier in the paper, and supports Burgoyne's (2004) plea for more "evidence based" support for the effectiveness of management education and training. It can be argued that this case study is able to demonstrate business research and teaching which is directly relevant in providing practical support to practising managers and impacting positively on their organisation.

The use of Bunning's (1992; cited in Lincoln, 2003) typology reinforces its relevance to research relating to learning and in this example adds to the literature through its usage in a specific public sector middle manager leadership situation and the fleshing out of specific elements under each type, based on our findings.

It is recognised that there are difficulties in attributing organisational changes directly to the programme, as other initiatives have been running alongside the programme, but examples used have all been where the line manager has been confident that the benefits can be ascribed to the learning from the course. Key personnel at the Council believe that the programme is making a difference at organisational level as the "critical mass" is being reached. For example, the Human Resources Director believes that the Leading Managers are contributing towards "a climate of trust" and that "you can tell who they are . . . that they have been through that experience, by their contribution and wider understanding of things . . . there is a confidence, yes, an aura . . . understanding and willingness to embrace change and the modernisation agenda that the other managers don't have".

Nevertheless, there are a number of limitations to the research presented in this paper. This is a case study and therefore questions regarding generalisability and transferability apply. There were no criteria set in advance as specific measures of success in the programme delivery. The issue of attribution has already been aired. It would also be interesting to have the views of the Leading Managers' team members, which could provide an interesting area for extending the research.

For other further research, it is proposed to carry out a second empirical study with the line managers of cohorts 4-6 to explore how their learning has transferred to the workplace and alongside to test the idea of "critical mass". It is also proposed that we should use the typology tables as a basis for further empirical work.

As the number of Leading Managers in the Council grows, it becomes more important that the programme continues to be subject to ongoing review (Beaton and Richards, 1998). The students' impact will become more significant and it is important to the organisation that the messages delivered throughout the programme are the right ones and that the Leading Managers' contribution to critical processes is in alignment with the Council strategy. The programme team already works closely in

partnership with the Council and this collaborative approach needs to continue. A new initiative is being introduced to try and ensure that the line managers of each cohort are involved more closely from the outset of the programme. Reviews of the programme could include a pre-course identification of critical success factors for individuals and for the programme cohort, set in consultation with the line managers. This might enable a firmer evidence-base to be established, to inform both policy-makers and practitioners at the Council. However, a faith-based approach also has its benefits – as one line manager explained, “I’m reasonably comfortable with acts of faith, ’cos once you’ve got faith in them and they in you, then you can trust and rely on somebody; through decent relationships, you can make sure you get value for what you invest”.

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Further reading

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