Blended Learning for Leadership Development in the FE Sector

Theresa Mellon
Research Publication Notices

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Executive summary

The aims of the research project were to identify which models of blended learning would be most effective in enabling leaders at different levels in the college to deliver a clear impact on our core business: the success of students.

The focus of the research was leadership development at Lewisham College and the project was carried out by the Learning and Development (L&D) team. Delivery models for leadership learning have tended to focus on small groups of senior staff, involve large amounts of face to face learning and there has been very little evaluation of impact on performance.

We wanted to examine whether a blended learning approach could be effective in offering development opportunities to a broader group of leaders and potential leaders. We also wanted to examine how blended learning affected the performance of leaders and whether organisational performance improved as a result.

The findings confirmed that blended learning can deliver benefits for the college in terms of impact on performance and wider access to leadership development. However, online learning has to be a key element of the blend to maximise the benefits.

There are considerable challenges in staff learners embracing learning technology despite their acceptance that this is the way forward for student learners. We have been able to make a number of practical recommendations to the college, to staff learners and to professional developers that we think will enable the college to make this important transition in the way it develops leaders.

Introduction

Further education (FE) colleges have to invest in leadership development to equip their organisations to tackle immediate and emerging challenges and to ensure the supply of the next generation of leaders. Leaders in FE have to deal with a very tough environment: the aftermath of the capital funding debacle, the shift of funding back to local authorities, multiple curriculum initiatives, intense focus on success rates, reductions in public sector funding, a difficult climate for industrial relations and pressure to form collaborative arrangements ranging from partnerships to mergers and takeovers.

Given the multiplicity and seriousness of the challenges, it is logical to assume that leadership qualities will have to be exercised throughout a college and not just left to the principal and a few senior managers. Research and writing on distributed leadership has been growing since the mid 90s and there is a body of knowledge that would support the assumption.

Lewisham College’s new principal, Maxine Room has been promoting the concept of distributed leadership and encouraging managers and staff at all levels to take responsibility and to contribute ideas that will make a difference to the quality of what is offered to learners. Therefore it has been very timely for the Learning and Development (L&D) team in the college to conduct this research into models of leadership development that are coherent
with distributed leadership. We are particularly interested in models of leadership development that make use of blended learning approaches.

Many of the principles of effective learning that colleges apply to their student learners are also applicable to staff learners. We know that retention of skills and knowledge and the ability to apply learning are improved by using a blend of learning strategies. The effective use of technology in student learning has made it easier to personalise the curriculum and to enable learners to study at times that are convenient to them. Therefore technology in learning can promote inclusion and widen access.

Personalisation is also about encouraging agency in student learners, helping them to take responsibility for and control of their learning. It would seem logical to apply methodologies that have been successful with adult and young learners to development programmes for college staff. With tight financial constraints, it is more important than ever before that leadership programmes result in improved performance for the college.

A culture of distributed leadership is one where individuals and teams take responsibility for their areas of work and have confidence in their own judgement and decision-making. Professional development programmes for college staff have tended to be highly structured and tutor-led. While these programmes have been of high quality and have been very well received, they have perhaps not done enough to promote self-direction among staff learners.

Technology has not yet been systematically embedded in staff learning programmes. As well as providing more opportunities for personalisation, more effective use of e-learning could help widen access to leadership development beyond the small number of employees who can be included in a formal development programme in any one year.

Therefore the aim of the research project was to develop innovative models of blended learning that will increase the access to and effectiveness of the leadership development programmes at Lewisham College.

**Research Objectives**

This research investigated the impact that different approaches to blended learning have on learners. Through our investigation we wanted to address the following questions:

- Has blended learning enabled learners to learn?
- What has been the impact on the performance of leaders?
- Are learners and their line-managers satisfied with the blended learning approach?
- Has blended learning improved the performance of the Learning and Development (L&D) function with regard to learner access, cost-effectiveness, range and quality of learning materials?

The target group for the research was the pool of leaders and potential leaders accessing L&D programmes. A cross-section of leaders and their line managers was approached to report on their experiences of blended learning and to express their preferences with regard to models for leadership development.
Theoretical Approach/Research Framework

One of the starting points for this research was consideration of what it means for Lewisham College to truly embrace the notion of distributed leadership. Our assumption is that we have to offer appropriate leadership development to staff at different levels in the organisation and also to help people to journey from one level to the next.

The issue of transitions to leadership is a particularly important one for FE colleges like Lewisham. The college has relatively low staff turnover and its structure has grown organically over the years. When a well known and effective employee is promoted to the next level, assumptions can be made that this transition needs little in the way of formal recognition or induction. While the college will continue to bring in new employees, it will also need to review the way it supports internal promotions to leadership roles.

One of the most helpful models for considering transitions to different levels of leadership is that of the ‘leadership pipeline’ as described by Charan, Drotter and Noel (2001). They identify six ‘passages’ that leaders go through from the bottom to the top of large organisations and identify skills, values and behaviours that are appropriate at the different levels.

Their ideas are based on successful approaches to leadership development and talent management first practised in General Electric in the 1970s under the direction of a highly respected human resources consultant, Walt Mahler.

Mahler’s key contribution was to demonstrate that changes in values and behaviours were as, or more important than development of skills. He observed that successful leaders had not only developed the skills they needed in a role but had changed their perspectives on what is important and made different decisions about how to spend their time.

A teacher who becomes a curriculum manager (Passage One according to the Leadership Pipeline concept) has to see the value in spending time on management tasks as well as knowing how to carry them out.

‘The highest-performing people, especially, are reluctant to change; they want to keep doing the activities that made them successful. As a result, people make the job transition from individual contributor to manager without making a behavioural or value-based transition. In effect, they become managers without accepting the requirements. The most difficult change for managers to make at Passage One, however, involves values. Specifically, they need to learn to value managerial work rather than just tolerate it. They must believe that making time for others, planning, coaching, and the like are necessary tasks and are their responsibility.’

(Charan, Drotter and Noel 2001)

The successful middle manager of a specific team (Passage Two in the Leadership Pipeline) has to deploy a different set of skills and behaviours if promoted to manage a group of departments. The authors make an interesting point about how inappropriate values can be reinforced at each level of hierarchy. A manager of managers may be ill placed to coach
junior managers in appropriate behaviours and values if they themselves never made that transition from being an individual contributor to being a manager.

‘Too often people who have been promoted to manager-of-manager positions have skipped Passage One; they were promoted to first-line managers but didn’t change skills, time applications or work values. As a result, they clog the leadership pipeline because they hold first-line managers accountable for technical work rather than managerial work. Because they themselves skipped the first passage and still value individual contributions above managerial ones, they poison the managerial well.’

(Charan, Drotter and Noel 2001)

Leadership development models have to help managers understand the personal changes they must make when they take on a new role. In 2008 CEL (LSIS) published a volume of practitioner research projects focusing on distributed and shared leadership and a volume investigating the development of middle leaders.

John Evans of Brighton and Hove College contributed to both volumes. In researching distributed leadership among middle managers in the general further education sector (Vol 8 2008), his findings indicated that quite different skills and behaviours were required of leaders depending on the level and context of their role.

Yet his research into how colleges prepared leaders (Vol 2 2007) found that most management and leadership programmes:

‘Give consistent weight to operational and technical expertise development to the detriment of ‘people based’ or ‘soft skill’ development. There is virtually no acknowledgement of the need to develop staff and middle management capacity to cope with personal change.’

(Evans 2008)

In this research we wanted to examine whether the blend of learning we were offering leaders at different levels was enabling them to develop the skills, behaviours and values that would result in improved performance in role.

The working definition of blended learning drawn from our practice at the start of the research was: the use of a range of learning strategies to meet the different preferences of our learners and to promote transfer of learning into practice. Our leadership development programmes had included work-based projects, work-shadowing, coaching and action learning sets as well as taught group modules and we were just beginning to use online learning.

A reading of blended learning literature offers definitions with more emphasis on the use of technology. For example:
Our intention was to review the findings from this research in light of the various definitions in order to propose a definition of blended learning that would aid communication with our staff learners and with the decision-makers who allocate funding for leadership development. The proposed definition is given in the Conclusions and Recommendations section.

The starting point in considering blended learning is the same as with planning any training intervention: clearly identifying the business goals and case. Josh Bersin (2004) presents the Training Investment Model (Figure 1) which he discovered in use in a number of insurance companies. This helps identify the type of business need and helps make decisions about whether investment should be made in off the shelf or more tailored (and probably more expensive) solutions.

**Figure 1**

![The Training Investment Model](image)

‘Blend of enabling technologies in order to create a hybrid model that merges elements of online learning, electronic performance support and knowledge management

(Bielawski and Metcalf 2003)

And:

*Blended learning integrates the use of the internet with a rich variety of other approaches and technologies to create an integrated learning experience*

(Bersin 2004)
Table 1 shows how the model might be adapted for a FE college. The content in the boxes would vary from college to college and there could well be heated debate about where specific initiatives fit. The important thing is to have the debate and then to make the appropriate level of investment. Blended learning programmes demand careful design and a range of learning resources. They are not a cheap option but can be very cost effective.

**Table 1 Training Investment Model**

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<th>Run the business (operational)</th>
<th>Win in the Market (strategic)</th>
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<td>Food and hygiene</td>
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Bersin also presents the Accenture Model (Figure 2) for Aligning Training to Business Objectives. This model creates a chain from the organisation’s strategic objectives through to the learning objectives of individual learners.

In this research we reviewed the extent to which we were able to determine business goals for leadership development programmes and what impact this had on the effectiveness of the programmes.

A great deal of attention is paid to the design of blended learning programmes. We reviewed the usefulness of design criteria derived from handbooks on blended learning as applied to our college programmes. We used a case study to analyse the design of a leadership programme for middle managers to identify the impact of design on outcomes.

In order to explore the impact of a blended learning approach on leaders’ learning and performance, we had to have access to good quality evaluation data. Using the four levels of evaluation proposed by Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2007), we reviewed our current evaluation practice. The four levels are: level 1 reaction, level 2 learning, level 3 behaviour and level 4 results.

We identified that most evaluation of training was being done at the reaction level with some monitoring of results in terms of expenditure and access. Therefore we devised an evaluation strategy for all staff Learning and Development programmes that would meet our research needs and also enable us to take a more systematic and holistic approach to evaluation in the future. A summary of the evaluation strategy can be found in Appendix 1.
Online learning has not been widely used in Lewisham College for staff learning programmes. In August 2008 the college contracted with a supplier, SkillSoft, to enable 400 staff to have access to a virtual learning environment (VLE) that offered a very wide range of self-study programmes on business topics and an extensive online library. This group includes staff who are potential leaders as well as those who are already in leadership roles.

We conducted an interim review of data obtained from the Learner Management System to examine how online learning was being used and whether more staff were accessing leadership learning than would have been possible prior to the introduction of this VLE.

**Research Methods**

We implemented the new evaluation strategy with a group of first line managers who completed a leadership programme, ‘Managing for Success’ in 2009. An online questionnaire probing motivation, satisfaction, impact on performance and support to transfer learning was administered to 24 delegates and 17 responses were received. Focus groups involving 18 delegates provided further feedback. Specific questions about the impact of
different blended learning approaches were included in the questionnaires and the focus groups.

Another online questionnaire was issued to 14 line managers of the delegates on ‘Managing for Success’ and 4 were completed. The line managers’ questionnaire probed their understanding of the programme aims and content, how they had supported their staff to transfer learning into practice and what impact they had observed on their staff’s on the job performance. 14 work-based project assignments were also reviewed to assess impact on performance. A report from the Programme Leader summarised the findings and provided additional commentary.

A second leadership programme involving 13 middle managers, ‘Leading for the Future’ was underway during the process of this research project. An internal case study of this programme was developed and the learning from that study has been integrated into the research findings.

In designing conventional management development programmes, L&D staff may rely largely on knowledge of their context and client group and on their own professional experience. Blended learning programmes require careful design to ensure that the blend is an effective one.

We also wanted to include in our research the broader group of potential leaders to be found at all levels in the organisation including those staff in non-managerial grades. Of the staff, 12 were participating in a foundation and career development programme, ‘Preparing for the Future’. We conducted an informal review of their responses to the blend of learning opportunities provided in that programme.

Lewisham College has been piloting a virtual learning environment (VLE) for staff during 2009 – 10 using a commercial product, Skillport. 285 staff at different levels were issued with licences giving them access to a comprehensive range of online training courses and an online library. We examined user data to detect general trends and sought specific feedback on their experience from a small group of users.

The research methods used are those that we plan to continue using as part of our evaluation strategy. They had to be practical and not take up excessive time for those administering or contributing to the research. The evaluation period coincided with a major restructure being announced in the college with many of the staff in our target group being affected. Therefore we had to be sensitive to feelings of vulnerability and anxiety and to make clear that we were evaluating programmes and not individuals. We also lost one of the members of the L&D team who left the college during this period. Given this context, the number and quality of responses was gratifying.

Table 2 Research Methods

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Research Findings

Since our findings have been drawn from different groups of staff learners and we have used a range of research methods, we have created a ‘lens’ through which to review the findings. The ‘lens’ is a checklist of features that should be present in successful blended learning programmes. Here it is applied retrospectively but it could be used to guide decision-making when designing a blended learning leadership programme. It is drawn from a range of texts on blended learning and from our own experience.

The elements in the checklist that we have used to review our findings are:

- Business alignment;
- Learner group;
- Design;
- Impact on learning and performance;
- Marketing and engagement.

A more detailed version of the checklist is given in Appendix 2 and we would welcome feedback from other leadership developers to improve and expand this framework.

Business alignment

Creating measurable goals for leadership (or any) development programmes is important in order to guide content and assessment and to enable effective evaluation. To what extent did we create measurable goals for the three programmes we have reviewed as part of this research? If we retrospectively apply the Training Investment Model developed by insurance companies and the Accenture ‘Aligning Training to Business Needs’ model – both cited in Bersin (2004), we can assess the extent to which our programmes were strategic and aligned to business objectives.

The ‘Leading for the Future’ programme could be categorised as a strategic investment to develop business critical competencies. Winning funding from government to maintain and expand student numbers in the college was dependent on improved success rates for students. The managers who were the target for the training programme were critical to the organisation’s ability to raise student success rates. However the outcomes set for the programme were very broad and did not specify the behaviours required to improve performance or the skills gaps to be addressed.
The aim of the ‘Managing for Success’ programme was to equip participating first line managers with a solid learning experience in the basics of management theory, practice and procedures. It was developed in response to feedback from senior managers that first line managers lacked basic skills, many having been promoted into their positions without receiving any management training. With reference to the Training Investment model it would be classed as an operational investment (although we might want to argue that for Lewisham College it met a strategic need). But again, no clearly measurable overall goals were set for the programme. ‘The same is true of ‘Preparing for the Future’.

While there have always been measurable learning objectives for leadership programmes in the college, it has been more difficult to agree common measurable outcomes in terms of behaviours and performance. Plans are in place to establish a new framework of leadership, management and core competencies for Lewisham College. The framework will reference the recently reviewed and refreshed college vision, mission and values. If we incorporate the leadership pipeline concept in developing these competencies, it will be much easier to define measurable performance objectives for future leadership programmes.

Our findings show that our leadership programmes at all levels have content designed to help leaders and potential leaders think about their roles and the behaviours that are likely to be effective, particularly with regard to influencing others.

There is a reasonable balance between what Evans (2007) calls ‘operational and technical expertise development’ and the skills associated with personal change.

However without an organisational competency framework, there was no clear specification of what makes a successful leader and participants’ progress could only be measured against very individual learning objectives. While it will continue to be a valid and central part of our approach to address individual learning goals, more rigour is needed in specifying the college’s requirements in terms of values and behaviours as well as skills.

**Learners: motivation, skills, conditions**

There was a high degree of convergence in the motivations of the staff learners joining leadership programmes: to gain knowledge and confidence in their current roles, to increase their ability to influence upwards and across the college, to prepare for changes that are taking place in the sector, to prepare for whatever might be their next career step.

The participants in the Leading for the Future programme had substantial input into content and design but did not have a choice about their participation in the programme. The Programme Leader’s view is that this factor had a negative impact on motivation.

Findings also show that the design of a blended learning programme can have an effect on motivation. Leading for the Future participants have commented that it has been difficult for them to maintain impetus where there is so much emphasis on individual choice although they have appreciated the flexibility. Participants in the other two programmes commented favourably on the structure of training, assessment and support in keeping them motivated to remain on the programme in the face of mounting workload pressures. In general, a Programme Flow model where...
...seems to work better with our learners. The Core and Spoke model where there is a core programme with a range of other learning activities and resources to be selected according to learner need, will only be effective where there is a strong culture of self-directed learning. The issue of workload has featured most strongly in participants’ responses on all programmes. Line-managers are seen as having an important role to play in helping participants to manage the sometimes conflicting demands of work and study. Our findings showed that while line-managers perceived themselves as offering appropriate support, the majority of participants perceived minimal levels of support to have been received. (It will be important to understand what underlies this difference in perception and we make some recommendations in the final section of this paper.)

Online learning has not been a major element in the formal leadership programmes and we need to know more about the motivations of the wider group who have access to Skillport. However, we have anecdotal evidence that the conditions for online learning are not favourable, with staff finding it hard to have uninterrupted time for self-study during working hours. It may be necessary to create dedicated learning spaces where staff can study away from their desks.

Some staff have been deterred from using the VLE because navigation of the portal can be very slow due to the inadequacies of the IT infrastructure. While it is obvious that student learners’ needs must be to the forefront when updating or renewing IT systems, staff learners’ needs will also have to be clearly articulated and factored into decision-making.

Findings indicate that we may have to do more to support staff learners’ time management and planning skills in order for them to learn more effectively. We may also have to give more attention to staff learners’ basic information technology (IT) skills to ensure they are able to comfortably and confidently use online learning packages.

**Blended Learning Design**

When we asked Managing for Success participants about what elements of the blend they liked, 88% responded that face-to-face training was the most useful part of the course. Action learning sets, 1:1 tutorial support and project management workshops also scored highly. Although they valued the work-based projects, many participants struggled to complete them and required quite high levels of support.

At the time of the interim review of the Leading for the Future programme, no participants had accessed online learning either through the college VLE or the Chartered Management Institute portal.

Preparing for the Future participants report appreciation of online resources to supplement learning but had not yet tried any online learning packages and were enthusiastic about...
learning collaboratively during the tutor-led sessions. Only 30% of staff with access to the college VLE were active users.

These findings tell us that our staff learners value group learning supported by tutors. Since leadership programmes aim to develop and reinforce behaviours and values, it is appropriate that there should be a social element and it is likely that group sessions will always form a core part of the blend. But online learning is an equally important element of the blend not least because there is a very real danger of a large gap opening between e-savvy student learners and college staff who are much less confident and competent using technology for learning.

This would be unacceptable in an educational institution whose business is to offer learning programmes to student learners where technology is increasingly used to aid personalisation. It is important to understand the structural and cultural barriers that are preventing staff from using technology to enrich their learning alongside more familiar approaches. It is also be useful to identify enabling factors derived from the experience of the active users.

Appendix 3 Review of Implementation of a Staff Virtual Learning Environment sets out some of the steps we will take to further investigate this issue.

Impact on learning and performance

Our findings show that a very high proportion of staff learners on our leadership programme believe that they are translating learning into practice. More than 80% of staff learners in the first-line manager and potential leaders’ groups report impact on how they do their jobs. Line-managers reported impact in general terms such as increased confidence and skill in tackling managerial tasks.

We were able to evidence more specific examples of impact on organisational performance through completed work-based projects for the Managing for Success cohort. An impressive range of quality improvement initiatives was carried out e.g. testing and implementation of a new student record system; tender for and selection of a new health care provider for the college; service point development and improved learning support provided at one of the Learning Centres.

The findings were more mixed from the middle-manager cohort. Participants and their line-managers reported positive changes in individuals’ confidence, morale and approach but found it much more difficult to identify concrete impacts on organisational performance.

Work-based projects would seem to be a key element of the blend for ensuring impact on performance. However the Programme Leader for Managing for Success reported this as being the most challenging part of the programme:

‘Many staff struggled with the concept of relating their learning with their work and we had to hold a number of project workshops to help support delegates to understand: how to plan and manage a project and how to write a project report highlighting personal learning outcomes.

(Kirsty Goulding, Programme Leader, Managing for Success)
It would seem that line-managers need to be more involved in the design and supervision of work-based projects to ensure timely completion but also so that line-managers are able to make more specific judgements about the impact of leadership programmes on their staff's performance.

**Marketing and engagement**

It is probably even more important with a blended learning leadership programme than with a conventional one to gain attention for what is on offer and to ensure full understanding on the part of the key stakeholders. Appendix 3 outlines the soft marketing approach we have taken to introducing the VLE. But limited success to date means that we may have to re-think our approach.

Both online learning and work-based projects are likely to be key elements in the blend used in our leadership development programmes. Line-managers will need to work more closely with programme participants to create suitable conditions for online learning and to co-design and evaluate the quality improvement projects.

Programme participants reported that the main form of support they received from their managers was the time to attend modules.

Marketing and engagement strategies prior to the start of leadership programmes will have to gain the support of hard-pressed line-managers for a greater level of involvement.

‘A much clearer contracting process is required – discussing and agreeing delegate and management commitment to participation in any future programmes. This would include a 1:1 meeting to agree outcomes, link to appraisal and agreed methods of communication regarding progress made.’

(Kirsty Goulding, Programme Leader, Managing for Success)

**Effectiveness and efficiency of L&D Service**

An effective L&D service should be able to demonstrate that leadership programmes are resulting in improved performance. This research demonstrates that we are beginning to provide evidence of improved performance. The research findings also indicate how we can achieve greater impact on learning and performance through better design of the blend and greater involvement of participants’ line-managers and team members. It is essential that we now continue to systematically evaluate all leadership programmes and apply the lessons learned equally systematically.

By the end of this financial year the L&D service will have reached considerably more staff than in previous years and online learning is the main vehicle for this expansion. However unless access figures translate into active usage, this expansion will not be meaningful. Where programmes are structured and guided by L&D, we can ensure that online learning is embedded. But to gain maximum benefits in terms of access and cost-effectiveness, we will have to generate more commitment to self-directed learning so that staff not enrolled on formal programmes can still develop their leadership, management and professional skills.
The high satisfaction ratings from the sample groups in this research also confirm that the quality and range of learning materials offered through blended learning programmes is appreciated by staff learners.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The main conclusion from this research is that the benefits of blended learning: effectiveness, access, personalisation are such that the only option for the college is to embrace this approach to leadership learning.

Definition of Blended Learning

We started this research with a working definition of blended learning drawn from our own practice: the use of a range of learning strategies to meet the different preferences of our learners and to promote transfer of learning into practice.

Given what we have learned about the importance of careful design of the blend and the need to boost the use of technology in staff learning programmes, we have strengthened the definition.

Blended learning integrates a range of learning strategies, including online learning and internet resources, to meet the different preferences of our learners and to ensure the transfer of learning into improved performance.

Key Findings from the Research project

1. **Blended learning works.** This research has demonstrated that participants on Lewisham College leadership programmes believe that their experience of learning through a blend of methods has enabled them to transfer learning to practice. There is some objective evidence from work-based projects to support this belief. These findings are in line with general educational findings on blended learning with regard to retention and application.

2. **Engaging staff in online learning is crucial if blended learning is to succeed.** The full benefits of blended learning will not be achieved unless we are able to engage significantly higher numbers of staff in online learning. In order to widen access and to provide the range and quality of leadership learning materials now available via the internet, online learning must be embedded into professional development programmes.

3. **Staff need time and space to learn.** Colleges have to keep on demonstrating that they value learning for staff as well as for students. Lewisham College has already shown that it values continuous professional development (CPD) through its policies. All staff, not just teaching staff, are entitled to up to 30 hours for CPD each year. But more needs to be done to fully translate the CPD policy into practice and in particular, to support different modes of learning.

4. **The dominance of tutor-led learning has to be challenged if leaders and potential leaders are to exploit the wealth of learning experiences available to them.** Staff have
to be moved out of their learning comfort zones and encouraged to try new ways of learning alongside those that are tried and tested.

5. **Design matters.** Just as with classroom learning, the design of the blended learning experience has an impact on the learning outcomes. The research showed how the blended learning model chosen could affect motivation and achievement.

6. **More clarity is needed about what colleges want leaders to do and be.** True alignment of leadership learning programmes with business goals is only possible where there is clarity about the leadership behaviours, values and skills expected by the organisation at different stages in the leader’s career.

7. **Line-managers (and teams) are key to linking leadership learning to performance.** The research showed very different perceptions on the part of learners and their managers about levels of support necessary to ensure learning could be applied in practice. The best results seemed to be achieved where there was ongoing dialogue about work-based projects and their role in transferring learning to practice.

8. **Systems have to serve staff learning as well as student learning.** While further investigation is needed to understand why there is such a high proportion of inactive users enrolled on the VLE, frustration with slow IT systems seems to be a significant factor. As the college invests in new IT infrastructure, the needs of staff learners will have to be addressed alongside those of student learners.

**Recommendations for the college**

**Valuing Learning**

If learning was truly valued by individual staff and the college organisation, we could expect to see high levels of energy, commitment and participation in blended learning programmes for staff. Creative solutions would be found to overcome barriers. Dr Sugata Mitra of NIIT, an international educational pioneer, has shown through his Hole in the Wall initiative how young slum children in India teach themselves and each other to use computers for learning. How can we generate the same hunger for learning in the college learning community where we have many fewer barriers to overcome?

There are practical things that the college leadership can do to signal that learning is valued. Staff are saying that they find it difficult to do online learning at their desks. It does not feel a legitimate use of time. They are interrupted by colleagues, by phone calls and other distractions. The creation of dedicated learning places for staff could promote a culture change as well as offering a practical solution. Some FE colleges are already having success with this approach: a comfortable room on each campus, furnished with computers where staff can do online learning, research or other project work.

More use should be made of the appraisal process to encourage accountability for learning. Every line-manager should have an objective about staff learning. In appraisal they should have to demonstrate how they have supported staff learning and what impact there has been on performance. Every staff member should have a CPD objective and be held accountable for how they have driven forward their own professional development.
Selection processes should also require evidence from applicants of how they have improved performance through effective staff development in previous roles.

There will be many other ways in which senior leaders can promote a culture that values learning, not least role modelling through their own learning activities and encouraging experimentation with different approaches to leadership development.

Creating impact
For leadership development programmes to support distributed leadership, there must be clarity about the skills, behaviours and values that leaders at different levels are expected to demonstrate. Lewisham College’s new leadership competency framework will provide that clarity. The leadership pipeline concept should be incorporated so that transitions from one level to the next are clearly marked. Selection and induction processes and leadership development programmes can then be designed to communicate, assess and develop the values and behaviours as well as the skills that are required at different stages of leadership.

Throughout the FE sector there is under-representation in senior management of people from diverse backgrounds e.g. women, people from black and minority ethnic groups, people with disabilities or who are lesbian, gay, transgender or bisexual. A more rigorous approach to developing and then using leadership competencies could help FE colleges to address this important equalities issue and to benefit more fully from the under-used talent in the sector.

This research demonstrates the crucial role that line-managers have in ensuring that leadership development programmes produce improved organisational performance. What is required is a change of mindset when managers agree to staff participating in leadership development programmes. Although some additional time will need to be invested, it is more a matter of understanding what is on offer and specifying the performance improvements that the line-manager-as-customer wants to see. Normal supervision and team meetings can be used to discuss progress and to draw other staff into the quality improvement projects.

Tools for Transformation
The IT infrastructure has to support blended learning for staff learners as well as for student learners. The particular solutions and policies about the extent to which resources can be shared by both groups of learners will be decided by those in the organisation with the necessary expertise and authority. The recommendation is to recognise that the needs of staff and students to become confident in using technology for learning are intertwined. One group cannot proceed at a faster pace than the other without serious problems being encountered.

Recommendations for staff learners
Perhaps the biggest challenge or provocation to all staff in colleges is do you practise what you preach? Whatever our role, backroom or student facing, we all espouse an approach to student learning that values agency, personalisation, self-awareness, responsibility. But when it comes to our own learning, are we too reliant on others to make the decisions and do we take a passive role?

Effective leaders are people who can take responsibility and work with others to solve problems. Staff who aspire to leadership positions and are the candidates for leadership
programmes should demonstrate their leadership capabilities in the ways in which they manage their learning.

The key recommendation for staff learners is to take responsibility for their learning and to be open to adventure, to experiment with different approaches, to embrace blended learning.

Recommendations for Professional Developers

Creating a tipping point

If we are convinced of the benefits of blended learning for staff and students, we need to have a critical mass of staff who are exposed to and comfortable with this approach. Many different individuals and teams around the college offer professional development to staff e.g. teacher developers, e-learning team, L&D service. Blended learning has to be systematically and creatively embedded in all professional development programmes. The community of professional developers should work together to learn from one another and to ensure common high standards in blended learning.

CPD for Professional Developers

New skills are required to design and implement effective blended learning programmes. Professional developers need to acknowledge their own needs to update their skills and to seek the support and time required for them to do this.

A more conscious approach to design of blended learning may be aided by checklists or other tools. An example that may be helpful is attached at Appendix 2.

The different demands of blended learning programmes on participants and their managers may mean that professional developers have to review and adjust their approaches to marketing programmes and contracting with learners and their managers.

Evaluation, evaluation, evaluation

Evaluation is still largely carried out at reaction level with some assessment of learning. The greatest demand for evaluation of impact often comes in times of severe resource constraints. Organisations need to know that precious resources expended on CPD programmes are having an impact on performance. However it is not always understood that some expenditure of resources is required in order to properly evaluate learning programmes. Professional developers have to be honest and assertive with commissioning managers about the time and effort that will be required for thorough evaluation. They also have to be disciplined about systematically applying the lessons learned even when the evidence might challenge their own preferred ways of working.
References


Evans, J. (2007-8) ‘Distributed Leadership: Investigating the distinction between the rhetoric of leadership and the behaviour required to be a successful ‘middle manager’ in Further Education’ in Researching Leadership in the Learning and Skills Sector: By the Sector, On the Sector, For the Sector – Distributed and Shared Leadership David Collinson (ed) Vol 8 pp8-12, 23-25


Acknowledgements

This research was carried out by the Lewisham College L&D team: Theresa Mellon, Kirsty Goulding, Natalie Porter and Patricia Christian. We would like to thank all the staff who participated in the research, completing questionnaires, attending focus groups, sharing their projects with us and sharing experience in informal discussions.
## Appendices

### Appendix 1 Evaluation Overview L&D Lewisham College

<table>
<thead>
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<th>What</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>When</th>
<th>How</th>
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<td>Immediate</td>
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<td>Facilitator Evaluation</td>
<td>All courses</td>
<td>Immediate</td>
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<td>Pre &amp; Post Course</td>
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<td>Questionnaire</td>
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<td>Reflective Log</td>
<td>All programme participants</td>
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<td>Focus Group</td>
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<td>Discussion with Managers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Final Report</td>
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<td>End of Programme</td>
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<td>Corporate Services Survey</td>
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<td>TBA by Head of Quality Improvement</td>
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<td>HR Survey</td>
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<td>Service Evaluation</td>
<td>All staff who have participated in training within period</td>
<td>1 x Year</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Report – Trainer Evaluation</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>2 x Year</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Report – Participant Evaluation</td>
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<td>2 x Year</td>
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<td>Report - Numbers</td>
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<td>Final Report</td>
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<td>2 x Year</td>
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PM – Programme Manager
Appendix 2 Draft Checklist for Designing Blended Learning Leadership Programmes

The intention is to develop this checklist into a useful tool using the dissemination event to work with other professional developers with an interest in blended learning.

Core Principles – apply to all leadership development programmes

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Consideration</th>
<th>Key Questions</th>
<th>Design Solutions</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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Business alignment

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<td>Measurable objectives (skills, behaviours, values)</td>
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<td>Outline evaluation strategy</td>
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<td>Equality Impact Assessment</td>
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Learners

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<td>Learning and performance objectives</td>
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<td>Skills for learning: e.g. time management, technology use, literacy/numeracy</td>
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<td>Motivation to learn</td>
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<td>Access to technology</td>
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<td>Blended model: trainer led, e-learning self-study, on-the-job, simulations, coaching</td>
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<td>Tracking and reporting</td>
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## Marketing and Engagement

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<td>Line manager engagement</td>
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## Evaluation

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<td>Performance</td>
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<td>Cost/time effectiveness</td>
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Appendix 3 Review of Implementation of Staff Virtual Learning Environment: Skillport

Theresa Mellon, Head of Learning and Development - 22nd March, 2010

Background

When it became apparent that the Learning and Development (L&D) budget for 2009/10 would be reduced by 30%, the L&D team decided to invest in a commercial virtual learning environment (VLE) that would enable 400 College staff to access online professional development materials at a cost of £17 per person. As well as aiming to make L&D resources go further, this initiative also linked with the College priority to embed e-learning among staff and students. A VLE was already in place for students and it was envisaged that introducing a VLE for staff would enable a more personalised approach to be taken to professional development.

The VLE holds a very large number of courses and simulations on a wide range of business topics such as leadership, management, personal development, basic skills such as Business English, Maths and ICT and the use of various Microsoft and other IT applications. The VLE also contains Books 24X7 with an extensive library on the same range of topics. The Learner Management System (LMS) enables the L&D team to monitor and track usage.

The intention was to pilot different ways of using this resource in order to find the most effective models for using online learning. Rather than have a major launch event and planned roll out, it was decided to take a more gradual and phased approach.

While a large, linear, cascading change programme can still be the appropriate model for introducing some major changes, recent thinking on change management focuses more on the human networks within organisations and ways of using viral approaches to embed changed behaviours (Herrero 2008). This involves identifying people with credibility and networks in the organisation, getting them on board with the change and asking them to model the new behaviours in order to influence their networks.

‘To successfully implement e-learning, forget what you know about change’ was a contention of Tom Werner, a researcher on innovative practices and technology (Bielwaski and Metcalf 2003). He puts forward nine ideas about change to consider when introducing e-learning. One of these is ‘forget about rollouts’. He looks back on the large change programmes of the 80s and 90s and asks how successful most of these were in actually achieving behaviour change. He counsels against rolling e-learning on to people and advises that it is better to pull people in.

Organisational context

Lewisham College has recognised that it needs to take steps to truly become an E-college, a place where technology is a central and enabling element in everyday learning and work. There is a particular concern that students’ experience of technology outstrips that of the majority of staff.
There is some work to be done to ensure that all staff have the level of basic ICT skills required to engage productively in e-learning and it is recognised that IT systems are in need of modernisation.

Educational organisations such as FE colleges tend to take a very structured approach to professional development. There is not yet a strong culture of self-directed learning. Therefore considerable behaviour change will be needed to take full advantage of the opportunities afforded by e-learning.

With full awareness of the context, a three year strategy was put forward for fully implementing online learning for staff. This report is written 8 months into implementation.

The Approach

A variety of approaches have been tried out:

1. Role models: The Senior Management Team and staff in the Quality Unit were asked to try at least one training package by a set date, to provide user feedback and to spread the word among their staff or teams that they support. To get people started, they were assigned a package (leadership development or time management) but they could do any package of their choosing.

2. Linking to an organisational initiative: A new appraisal process was launched in November 2010. Every line manager the college was given a licence for Skillport and assigned packages and book chapters relevant to performance management and appraisal. Around 40 managers attended a briefing where Skillport was introduced. A booklet with screenshots on how to access Skillport was sent to each manager.

3. Embedded into formal learning programmes: Skillport packages are used as pre and post course work for the 12 delegates on the Preparing for the Future programme. A large ICT training programme is about to be implemented with around 100 business support staff in Corporate Services.

4. Free access: A number of individual staff have been given licences and encouraged to use Skillport to find learning packages of relevance and interest to them. These staff have usually approached L&D with a specific need e.g. help with time management, assertiveness, note taking. They have been supported to address the specific need but then encouraged to make more use of the VLE.

Uptake to date

285 staff have access to Skillport but only 58 (20%) are active users. The Corporate Services programme will boost user numbers but this is still a disappointing result.

It is now important to consult active and non-active users about the factors underlying the user data. There is some anecdotal evidence that a number of issues may be affecting take-up.

- Navigation of the VLE can be very slow when using it in college – a consequence of an IT infrastructure that is no longer fully fit for purpose;
Lack of clarity about policy on time provided during working hours for self-study and expectations of investing personal time in professional development;

- The quality and style of the courses. While the content is generally seen to be good, the linear, programmatic teaching approach, the corporate feel of the visuals and the bias towards US materials may be off-putting for some learners;

- Lack of familiarity with online learning and low awareness of strategies for successfully engaging with online packages;

- Preference for and dependence on tutor-led professional development sessions.

We need to find out if these or other factors are putting up barriers to online learning and to learn from those who are successfully using the VLE. The L&D team will continue to embed online learning within formal training programmes. However it will not be possible to offer tutorial support and structured programmes to all 800 staff. In addition, more and more good quality learning materials are being offered free or at low cost on the internet by organisations such as the Open University.

The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) provides free access to all in the FE sector to some excellent online learning resources and to library portals. We want college staff to be able to take advantage of these riches.

Dr Sugata Mitra of NIIT, an educational and talent development company has pioneered an approach whereby young slum children in India teach themselves and each other to use computers for learning. There must be ways in which we can inspire our adult learners in the college workforce to use technology to help drive their own professional development.

Next steps

- Survey or focus groups with Skillport active and inactive users;

- Consult the supplier to learn from implementation experiences in other educational institutions;

- Consult Trade Union Studies about their experience of engaging trade unionists in flexible, online learning;

- Engage in some creative thinking with different stakeholders about what we could do differently that could be more successful;

- Re-think our approach to marketing and implementation in light of the learning gained from this review.