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DEVELOPING LEADERS OF CHANGE IN INNER-LONDON  
SIXTH FORM COLLEGES

Ian Claussen

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## Contents

<u>ABSTRACT</u> .....	2
<u>CHAPTER 1 AIMS, VALUES AND CONTEXT</u> .....	3
<u>CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY</u> .....	15
<u>CHAPTER 3 THE FIRST LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME 2004-5.</u> .....	35
<u>CHAPTER 4 REFLECTIONS ON THE FIRST LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME</u> ..	47
<u>CHAPTER 5 PROBLEMS FOR THE LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME CYCLE</u> ...	62
<u>CHAPTER 6 THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME 1 AND LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME 2</u> .....	67
<u>CHAPTER 7 REFLECTION ON THE SECOND LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME 2005-2006</u> .....	73
<u>CHAPTER 8 AFTER THE LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME 2006-2011</u> .....	87
<u>CHAPTER 9 WHAT MAKES AN EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME.</u> .....	95
<u>CHAPTER 10 FINDINGS</u> .....	107
<u>CHAPTER 11 SOME PERSONAL REFLECTIONS AND THE SUMMER OF 2011</u> .....	114
<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u> .....	118

## ABSTRACT

There is an increasing focus on developing leaders in the further education sector both to improve the experience of students in the sector and to prepare the next generation of leaders. The case study that follows was an investigation of a series of internally run, action learning based leadership development programmes which took place in an inner-London borough in different organisations over a period of years. It was assumed that leadership in sixth form colleges is leadership of academic change to respond to external pressures or to improve teaching and learning practice. Although leadership programmes have to engage with a continually changing neo-liberal, instrumentalist, national educational environment, there is here a further assumption that there is a local dimension to the challenges of leadership in further education and that inner-London with its diversity, social deprivation and cultural richness offers a specific leadership challenge and focus for academic change

The research argues that organisations should indeed undertake appropriately designed collaborative action learning programmes, focused on leadership and institutional improvement because they can have a positive impact on the experience of staff and students, make tacit knowledge and understanding explicit and prepare for succession in the sector. These programmes need to be informed by a moral and political vision focused on a broader understanding of the educational needs of students than the current neo-liberal agenda offers.

It is also suggested that leadership programmes should be available to all staff not just to middle and senior managers. It is claimed that the ingredients of leadership programmes are successful in as far as they stimulate reflection, make tacit understanding explicit and are taught using active teaching methods which mirror how teachers are expected to engage with their students in the classroom. Coaching is seen as a useful professional development to support this process especially if balanced by a clearly articulated creation of professional, learning communities both within and between organisations. These programmes are more effective if the process is accredited through partnerships with the university sector

The ‘virtues’ of leadership it is argued from an Aristotelian perspective, cannot be taught but need to be developed through practice. Action research or research into practice properly understood and carried out is therefore believed to be an effective way to develop understanding of leadership when combined with the right theoretical ingredients. It is hoped that this research has proposed a model for developing leaders of academic change which is of interest not just in inner-London but in the sector in general.

## **CHAPTER 1 AIMS, VALUES AND CONTEXT**

The aim of this case study is to investigate a specific strategy for promoting the leadership of academic change which took place at College X between 2004 and 2006. This strategy is then contrasted with a period between 2007 and 2009 during which I was not involved in developing leadership capacity and alternative interventions focused on leadership for staff in an inner-London borough secondary sector and at College Y between 2009 and 2011. The focus is on leadership as opposed to management because leadership is the current focus of the sector and because, following Cuban quoted by Bush and Middlewood (2011:4) it is understood that leadership is linked ‘with change, while management is seen as maintenance activity.

There are several ideas that will be examined in what follows. Firstly it is assumed that it is necessary to run leadership programmes and that with effective methodology and appropriate content it is possible to devise programme that not only prepare future leaders properly but also improve the chances and experience of students. Secondly there is an assumption that inner-London is a unique context that requires a specific response for professional development, pedagogy and leadership. Linked to this idea is the view that internally focused leadership programme are more effective than externally run programmes because they respond to the local context. Finally the efficacy of action research as a tool leading to genuine change in the work place will be explored

As this is work based learning based on qualitative approaches, before describing the methodology and the case study in detail, it is helpful to portray the values that inform my professional life. In ‘Action Research Living Theory’ Whitehead and McNiff (2006: 82) claim that ‘making judgements about the quality of practice means making value judgements, in terms of what you find valuable in the practices. You judge things in terms of what you think is good.’

It is also necessary to provide the background and context for this study and describe the various stakeholders who have influenced the research. I will then clarify the research questions I am answering and acknowledge the boundaries that must exist in qualitative research of this nature.

### **Educational values**

Aged 10 in 1968 my values were forged in a world influenced by May 68 and a hippy sense of the possibility of alternative life styles. I would prefer to live in a world which produces slogans such as ‘they are buying your happiness steal it back’ or ‘the alarm clock rings- first humiliation of the day (quoted in an article by John Harris in the Guardian 21/03/08) than the post Thatcher world in which we all live now, since Margaret Thatcher’s much quoted statement from 1981 that ‘economics were the method and the object is to change the soul.’ To paraphrase Kathy Lette, who said that post-

feminist women had 'kept her wonder bra and burnt her brains,' we have kept our cars and possessions and burnt our dreams. The purpose of education and its leadership cannot be therefore for me entirely about economic capacity. It is also to borrow a slogan from the anti-globalisation movement to keep alive the view that 'another world is possible.'

My own experience of education has led me to believe that it can offer success and non-material reward, and can provide a life time of pleasure in so far as I have been taught to appreciate reading and the value of speaking other languages. It also enables me to engage critically with the world and has provided me with the tools to continue to learn.

My career as a teacher has taken place in inner-London and against the policy background of widening participation. I consider it essential that students from more disadvantaged backgrounds do have access to the privileges from which I have benefited. It certainly is the case that the purpose of the leadership of change in the FE sector has to be social mobility, social inclusion and to fulfil the material aspirations of young people from a relatively deprived background. The leadership of change in an inner-London academic environment while being about fulfilling material ambition should however also be about developing the capacity to create another world

Any investigation of the leadership of change in inner-London has to understand this dual purpose of academic change in an inner-London context. Work-based learning is the perfect strategy for this project as what follows is based not only on theoretical assumptions about leadership, academic change, and how change is best implemented but also on the needs of inner-London students and the voice and experience of inner-London sixth form college teachers.

It is also the case that work based learning is sufficiently flexible to accommodate the rapid changes that have taken place and are taking place in my career and perspectives as well as in the FE sector as a whole. The history of this project over a period of years will be the history of the tension between progressive values and the free market influenced commodification of education, between the needs of inner-London students and the context independent scrutiny to which the inner-London colleges have been subjected and my increased understanding and sensitivity to relevant issues.

### **The inner-London context**

The original professional change strategy that informs this work took place in College X, which is situated in an inner-London borough. 80% of its students are from immigrant communities and the percentage of students receiving the Educational Maintenance Allowance indicates high levels of poverty and social exclusion. College Y is very similar in its context and the problems which it confronts.

For the Labour government elected in 1997 the purpose of education and learning was largely instrumental. According to successive governments education is about training

people for the so called knowledge based society, providing them with the skills necessary for employment and for a competitive economy. In the inner-London context education became the mechanism by which the less privileged in society were to be given access to the opportunities of the more privileged. The new labour government had a widening participation target that 50% of the population should be university educated by 2010. This was an example of the new labour 'third way' which offered a 'synthesis of traditionally competing agendas , facilitating a neat discursive synchronisation of utilitarian and progressive objectives-democratising access to higher education and empowering the individual, whilst 'tooling up' UKPLC@ to compete in a global economy' (Doyle, 2003)

Now that the conservative and liberal democrat coalition is triumphant the instrumental focus of education from the government's perspective is in no way diminished, although the 50% target has been abandoned. The new government has in fact focused on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects at the expense of the humanities and the arts. At the same time the cost of going to university has tripled and the government is talking about a two tier university system with some universities catering for students with AAB or above at A level and others catering for the rest. The government does talk about increasing social mobility but the 'progressive objectives' of new labour seem to have been abandoned. In spite of rhetoric, the government's policies seem to suggest an ever more socially stratified future.

Whatever government is in power and however dispiriting the outlook, social mobility will not be improved in the United Kingdom unless 16-19 year olds from relatively deprived backgrounds in colleges like those in inner-London are successful in their education. It is possible in fact to argue that the more socially stratified the education system is, the more inner-city colleges need to be successful for their students, the more these students need effective teaching and leadership.

It is undeniable that the impact of the leadership of academic change in all colleges, independently of the ideological priorities of whatever government is in power, needs to be improved exam results and access to university with its consequent social advancement .It is also the case that this focus on exam success creates pressure on young people and may lead to disappointment as the material expectations created by an instrumentalist view of education are not met. Many students arrive at inner-London sixth form colleges to discover that they will never be doctors, lawyers or stockbrokers and also that it is difficult for them to achieve the necessary academic standards and make the necessary transition from GCSE. Furthermore many graduates do not gain access to graduate level employment and therefore do not benefit materially from access to university.

Two reports by the Sutton Trust have indicated that widening participation does not necessarily change the life chances of the kind of young people that study at inner-London Colleges and inform the current government's rhetoric about social mobility. 'Intergenerational mobility in Europe and North America' (<http://cep.lse.ac.uk/about/news/IntergenerationalMobility.pdf> ) reveals that Britain has

the lowest social mobility of eight European countries and Canada. Britain and the USA have a similar gap between rich and poor but only in Britain is social mobility declining. According to 'Entry to Leading Universities' (<http://www.suttontrust.com/reports/entryToLeadingUnis.pdf>) the chance of getting into a top 13 university is approximately 25 times greater if you come from an independent school than from a lower social class or live in a poor area.'

Genuine social mobility can then only be achieved with great difficulty for the students of the colleges that are the focus of this work, especially when government policy channels students into an educational choice which reproduces existing social stratification. It also means that desires for social transformation and to contest the existing order will come second to finding one's place. Education in inner-London should nevertheless be about learning to learn and the development of a critical, reflective approach to society, which can only be achieved by the best teaching that balances exam success with other less instrumental priorities.

'The development of a critical, reflective approach to society' will also help reduce vulnerability to the sirens of extremism of all kinds for young people in inner-London whose desire to find their place is frustrated. When ambitions evaporate, it is too easy for preachers in inner-London to persuade young Muslims to confuse radical ideology with theology or to convince young Christians of extreme literalist interpretations of biblical text. According to the Home Office in 2011 the inner-London borough that is the focus of this study is one of 25 boroughs nationally identified as at risk of being a location of radicalisation and extremism. Operation Overt in 2006 had already discovered a plot to blow up planes based in the area and extremists remain active in the borough.

It is also undeniable that the problems that confront young people in areas of urban deprivation and in the United Kingdom in general are exacerbated in inner-London as it has some of the poorest boroughs and a transient population, with many refugees and students arriving from all over the world. The Home Office in 2010 says that the borough in this case study is ranked 25<sup>th</sup> for deprivation out of 354 local authorities. Sixth form students in inner-London sometimes live alone or do not live with their biological parents. Carers regularly do not speak English and all communication with state organisations needs to be carried out by the young person. At the very least students may have to work many hours to support themselves financially or be responsible for younger siblings or aged carers. To make the situation even more difficult many students do not have post 16 educational experience in their families and have often experienced urban teacher shortages in their pre GCSE education. A lengthy journey needs to be taken with these students to enable them to fulfil their aspirations.

When academic change and leadership are focused on inner-London students a particular vision and effort is required. To help these people succeed is particularly important. A particular focus on academic change and outstanding teaching and learning is required. There also needs to be an effort to compensate for the intensity of urban deprivation by exploiting the unparalleled access to universities, employers, art, culture and diversity that London has. London is the most multi-cultural city in Europe. It has 7.000.000



inhabitants who speak 300 different languages and has resident communities from 90 different countries. It offers students therefore unparalleled richness of opportunity.

In the Chartered London Teacher Status, a framework created for secondary teachers, the unique challenge of inner-London is recognised. To achieve this status, London secondary teachers have to demonstrate ‘their achievements across the following strands relating to their practice, enquiry and professional development’;

- Understanding diversity:
  - To be aware of the experience and diversity of learners
- Developing pedagogy:
  - To respond to their diversity with appropriately sophisticated pedagogy
- Renewing Subject engagement:
  - To share enthusiasm and to demonstrably be a learner also
- Responding to whole college issues and initiatives:
  - To work in a community of teachers to develop consistent practice for the benefit of students
  -

The students of inner-London FE and sixth form colleges also require the kind of response to their needs offered by the chartered London teacher status .It should provide them with educational success, strategies for meta-cognition and a critical, challenging attitude to the world around them.

### **The staff**

College X and College Y became sixth form colleges in 1986.The number of teaching staff has expanded considerably in that time although a sizeable minority of teachers have been working there for twenty five years. Sixth form colleges are generally agreeable places to work and very few staff leave, creating frustrating blockages for the ambitious. This means that there are networks of staff that are used to working with each other in a certain way and that it is possible that not only friendships but also enmities have developed. Such long established networks, because of pedagogical habits and personal loyalties, may resist change either internally driven or externally imposed.,

The workforce at these Colleges is therefore a potentially volatile and complex mix of age-groups, friendships, enmities and values that could theoretically combine to resist change. The colleges have also increased radically in size since their inception and diseconomies of scale have meant that tribal cultures are more easily formed and consistency is harder to achieve.

While it is indeed true that at College X, while there are many able and positive staff, there is a tribal culture and pockets of resistance to change, at College Y there seems to be less resistance to change and generally less cynicism. This means that professional

change strategies are potentially easier to introduce.

Nevertheless if change is to be achieved against a background of possible resistance and inconsistency of values it would seem to be worthwhile to start from what teachers at College X and College Y have in common. Whatever our politics and motivations we are all confronted by inner-London students who have many problems and who don't seem motivated to learn. The government expects results and grades to constantly improve and this seems difficult to achieve. Leadership of change needs to build on the shared challenge of responding to the needs of a particular set of students and meeting nationally generated expectations for improvement. It should also understand how challenging this is for the staff concerned.

### **The national context**

A major transformation took place in the FE sector in 1993 when sixth form colleges and general FE colleges were incorporated, which means that they became self-governing and responsible for their own finances. Colleges employed finance directors for the first time and became accountable for the success of their students in a new way. Although sixth form colleges had a stronger teaching and learning ethos than FE colleges, this was the time when students became customers, when the student voice became an essential part of scrutiny and strategy and when properly prepared and trained leaders were required. In other words it was incorporation that paved the way for the leadership focus of this research.

The FE sector has experienced since 1993 what has been called 'new public management' which means that old public administration values have been replaced by management techniques from the private sector and values such as consumer choice, responsibility and accountability from neo-liberalism' Successive governments, New Labour from 1997 and the coalition from 2010 have reinforced the use of techniques from the private sector and increased the accountability of the sector. For colleges accountability means producing ever improving exam results. This can be a challenge in the difficult context, in which inner-London colleges operate,

The most visible change in which 'new public management' strategies have been implemented in FE in the last 10 years has been the focus in Further Education on the importance of teaching and learning or academic change to successfully prepare 14 to 19 year olds for the future and the development of quality improvement measures ostensibly to make sure this goal is achieved. These developments were crystallised in 'Success for All: Reforming Further Education and Training' published in 2002. There were 4 key themes:

- Meeting needs and improving choice
- Putting teaching and learning at the heart of what FE does.
- Developing the leaders, teachers and support staff of the future
- Developing a framework for quality and success.

'Raising skills and improving life chances' (March 2006) continued the process of change. It introduced vocational diplomas for 14-19 students, advocated personalisation of learning and it introduces an obligatory 30 hours a year continuing professional development for teachers.

The goals and aims above are laudable and by emphasising the importance of meeting needs seem to encourage the inner-London focus of this project. They are, however, backed up by neo-liberal strategies for accountability and performance management, which include stringent inspection, target setting, funding regimes based on learning outcomes for fulltime students and self-assessment. In inner-London, because of the problems confronted by students, it is a particular challenge to meet the demands of this agenda and produce better than satisfactory outcomes. Most significantly for inner-London FE colleges it is no longer the case that they can remain in a state of stasis. Coasting organisations which remain satisfactory are subject to increased scrutiny.

At the same time as the sector is being asked to pursue academic change, meet its targets and constantly improve, 'Success for All' also provided the national framework for focusing on leadership. This is deemed to be particularly necessary because the sector is reputedly experiencing a succession crisis. It is not clear where the leaders of the future are going to come from because of the age profile of those currently in management positions. It has become the task of the 'Centre for Excellence in Leadership' now subsumed within LSIS to develop leaders. In their Portfolio 2004-05 Lynne Sedgemore CBE the CEO describes the centre's credo in the following way:

'We believe that the leadership of teaching and learning is fundamental to the sector alongside effective leadership of learners, staff and organisations'

The national focus on leadership is a focus on change and is clearly in the service of the neo-liberal agenda. Ideas of leadership and developing of teaching and learning and constant improvement are then intrinsically mixed in the FE sector since incorporation and 'Success for All' and form the original national context for this project. In fact colleges can choose between leadership programme offered nationally by LSIS and the kind of internal, context driven programme which is the initial focus of this project. Whichever path a College adopts the key challenge for leadership is to meet both the needs of students and nationally created expectations. This is not always easy as the following quote from the former principal of College X indicates.

'The frustrating thing is that although I am firmly convinced that tackling these kinds of issues (improving teaching and learning and responding to the London context) is key to the longer term improvement and success of the College, neither the task itself nor our progress in relationship to it weighs much when judgments are made about our effectiveness.'

The task for leadership in inner-London is in fact to both respond to the needs of inner-London students by focusing on academic change and to satisfy judgements made about

effectiveness by Ofsted and other national organisations, in other words both to accommodate and resist the national context.

### **The possibility of change**

If the goal of this project is to investigate a case study that investigates a change intervention then the project needs to be framed by an awareness of the possibility of change and the debate between determinism and agency. It should be as far as possible clear that change which runs counter to the national/international context is at all possible.

The work-based learning in this project attempts to make sense of leadership of academic change against a background of intersecting personal values and complex local and national contexts. Fundamentally there would be no purpose in developing leaders of academic change if national policy and the operation of power in the end deny inner-London students the possibility of social mobility and social transformation and make teachers and leaders powerless. This project has to suppose that educational institutions are not exclusively aimed 'at the reproduction of socio-economic systems, that depend on one level on the production of human capital through the inculcation of knowledge and skills and at another level on the social transmission of varying levels of ignorance' (Sharp and Green: *Education and Social Control*. 75). To what extent then might the leadership of change lead to genuine opportunities for inner-London teachers and students?

Gramsci offered a subtle analysis for understanding the operation of power. He accepted that power was maintained coercively but also felt it was consented to willingly because of ideological hegemony, which he described as a system of values and beliefs permeating society diffused by institutions such as schools which promote ruling class values tacitly. These values become for the general population part of the natural order of things which they do not wish to change.

According to this analysis the educational choices made by young people in places such as inner-London becomes a mechanism in which young people accept the dominant values of their culture because this is the way things are. It might be argued that the kind of leaders that are developed in the FE sector do not matter as young people will consent to existing social and ideological order.

From a theoretical perspective structure seems to be winning in the battle against agency or the possibility for change and self-determination. Foucault, also, in works such as 'Discipline and Punish: the birth of the prison' (1979) might be said to make all of us the subjects of inescapable structures or fields of what he calls 'power knowledge'. In 'disciplinary society' operating in schools and other controlling institutions power and knowledge constitute each other in a productive/repressive relationship to which we are all subjected, to which we all consent and from which there is no escape.

This model of structural domination is very influential in analysis of education. Doyle

(2003), for example, quotes Edwards and Usher (1994) suggesting that people are 'empowered to disempower themselves. In other words conceptualisations of empowerment are restricted within narrow economic roles whereby learners become the subjects of their own surveillance, managing their own learning, within defined discursive parameters'. For Foucault students, teachers and for that matter leaders of change would be active participants in a situation designed to 'compare, differentiate, rank, homogenise and exclude'.

Bourdieu is an equally influential thinker in the field of education. He too allows for little room for manoeuvre for the individual when confronted by implacable social structures. Economic capital is translated into symbolic capital in the form of cultural capital which reproduces and justifies the existing structure of society in the field of art, education etc. He anticipated for example what has actually happened to educational qualifications in the UK in an era of widening participation. As qualifications become more widely available, he predicted that there would be new more exclusive qualifications as well as grading such as the A\* to reproduce the educational privilege of the elite.

This consent to ideological hegemony or 'the 'internalisation of objective possibilities as subjective expectations' (Wolfrey 2000) becomes what Bourdieu calls the 'habitus' In inner-London colleges, for example, students would have a specific habitus ,which they almost unconsciously acquire depending on their class or ethnic identity and it would be by definition at odds with the habitus of the dominant class as it might manifest itself in the elite universities of the UK. Our students would be excluded not only by the curriculum they choose (new subject versus traditional subject) but by the values and way of being of the university world once they reach it. From a theoretical perspective the findings of the reports on social mobility and access to elite universities are not surprising. Callinicos (1999) in fact suggests that thinkers like Foucault and Bourdieu share the theme 'that human beings are fated to be prisoners of the structures of domination'?

As someone who has worked inner-London sixth form colleges for a long time, this somewhat depressing perspective doesn't seem quite right. I regularly meet former students whose lives have been transformed by their experience of education. In other words change does seem possible.

The solution for Gramsci was the development of critical understanding of what was occurring, in which the role of traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals emerging from the working class is crucial. The purpose of academic change in inner-London might therefore be to provide students with the tools to exert an influence on prevailing ideological values and a critical framework with which to understand their operation.

For Bourdieu too change is possible, Brigit Fowler (1997: pg2,) suggests that structuralist thinkers tend to 'see events through observers' eyes rather than native eyes'. This enhanced the expectation of rule following and underestimated the degree of creative disorder from which advantages might be derived.' In other words within the rules of the

habitus there is room for creativity and the possibility of allowing for both personal and group change. The leadership of academic change can then allow for individual progress and if a sufficient ‘tipping point’ is reached can change and transform the habitus of the privileged. Education cannot on its own transform society but it is not obliged to replicate it. Teachers then can make a difference.

To achieve the change necessary for social justice and transformation, it is therefore necessary for the leadership of inner-London sixth form colleges to develop a multi-factorial approach to their task. We must not focus exclusively on education as the development of human capital but on a broader sense of learning. At a time when young people are faced by the Scylla and Charibdis of fundamentalism on the one hand and empty materialism on the other it would seem that education needs indeed to promote the development of a critical perspective on the instrumentalist expectations with which they are surrounded, and to provide them with the tools to create disorder in the rules of the game. This is why the mission statement at College Y with its focus on ‘questioning’ as well as ‘caring’ seems appropriate.

‘Working within a safe, welcoming and stimulating environment, which embraces diversity and promotes respect, we help students fulfil their academic potential and become thinking, questioning and caring members of society.’

It is also worth reminding ourselves of the value of learning for its own sake, which is still an intrinsic part of the value system of the elite, and which is still to be found in the top universities. It is useful here to consider the distinction between a commodity and gift (Hyde, 2006). A gift as described by Lewis Hyde creates a sense of community while a commodity exchange creates alienation and freedom. In a world that sees education as a commodity to be exchanged for material gains and potential social freedom it is also important to see it as a gift which is shared and creates bonds.

This project therefore starts from the assumption that the focus of academic change in an inner-London context is to meet the aspirations of young people for material success and social promotion but it is also to develop in them a critical and constructive engagement with their community. This also needs to maintain the ‘possibility of another world.’ It is worthwhile investigating the necessary ingredients for a leadership programme in inner-London sixth form colleges, so that young people and their communities are offered the possibility of genuine transformation.

## **Aim**

The aim of this project is to investigate a professional development strategy for creating leaders of academic change in inner-London sixth form colleges in order to see what kind of programme might have a genuinely positive impact on staff and students

## **Research questions**

1. What would a leadership programme in inner-London sixth form colleges need to achieve to be successful?
2. What would be the ingredients for a successful leadership of change programme in College X and other widening participation inner-London sixth form Colleges such as College Y?

## **Stakeholders**

The stakeholders for this project are the leadership of the sixth form Colleges that are the focus of this work. There is a general acceptance that there will be a succession crisis in the sector and that current staff will need to be ready to take on leadership roles and that widening participation students from relatively deprived backgrounds need skilled leadership focused on academic change. However at College X the view was that middle managers were not only future senior leaders but the only genuine agents of change. They and not the senior leadership team were then the focus of the effort to develop more sophisticated understanding of leadership and were the main stakeholders for the project.

The participants in both leadership programme were also stakeholders as the programme needed to match their needs and be worth their time and energy. It is their responses to their experience that has informed my conclusions

Finally the students of the inner-London sixth form Colleges where this case study took place, with their energy, humour, disrespect for what is conventionally respected and their aspirations are the real stakeholders. Their voice is not directly heard in what follows but 22 years of teaching in these colleges has allowed me to understand that to meet the needs of these students a college needs to understand the nature of the inner-London context and be well led.

## **Boundaries to the research**

There are inevitably boundaries to this research. The case study only takes place in two very similar sixth form colleges and the assumption that inner-London is a unique context which requires a specific response is not tested against experience of similar programme in other sixth form colleges. Also the programmes that are the focus of this study affected a relatively small number of staff at each institution so it is difficult to measure their impact on the whole institution. It is furthermore the case that during the period described I have been a middle manager of relatively senior status who experiences his professional life from that perspective and is already won over to the values and assumptions which underpin the programme to be described.

According to Yin (2009: 187-188) successful case studies must 'display sufficient evidence' and 'consider alternative perspectives'. It is to be hoped that my engagement with the leadership of academic change in inner-London sixth form colleges over a considerable period of time has led to the provision of sufficient evidence for what I

ultimately claim and that the range of alternative perspectives described counteracts the possible boundaries imposed by my professional values.

How to promote academic change in inner-London, how to develop a successful leadership programme and prepare people for future succession are all what Grint (2008) calls 'wicked problems'. Most organisational problems are of this nature, so that leadership becomes not about offering solutions but about asking the right questions. Grint claims responding to 'wicked problems' is about being a 'bricoleur' who 'makes progress by stitching together whatever is at hand, whatever needs to be stitched together to ensure practical success. Grint goes on to say that 'this is not the clean world of analytic models and rational plans'. Similarly there are no right and wrong answers to what kind of leadership programme is most effective or if indeed one is needed at all. The following 'bricolage' will nevertheless attempt to make recommendations and to be 'composed in an engaging manner', which is the last essential characteristic of a successful case study as identified by Yin (2009:189).



## **CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY**

The following chapter will describe and analyse the methodological choices made in this research and consider the impact on these choices of the professional roles I have had during the relevant period.

The roles I had at College X during the leadership programme have made my engagement with academic change and leadership possible. They have also inevitably influenced my choice of methodology. My subsequent roles at College X and College Y have helped me gain greater insight into the leadership programme and the effectiveness of that methodology.

### **Management roles**

#### **Head of the Professional Development Unit at College X**

College X had developed a strategy on improving teaching and learning for inner-London students and academic change since 2002, based on shared understanding of the task that it confronted. A group of teachers were brought together to discuss why, although teaching was in general good, this was not matched by student attainment. They consequently developed the Academic strategy for the college. It consists of 4 areas, which if they became the focus of our efforts, would improve learner performance.

- Positive work ethic
- Subject engagement
- Independence
- Scholastic skills

The need for the academic strategy was in fact reinforced by an inspection in 2002, which identified excellent teaching in the college, which was still not matched by student attainment or learning. The principles informing my focus on teaching and learning not just as head of the PDU but throughout my career have been best summed up by Frank Coffield in 'Just suppose teaching and learning became the first priority' (LSN 2008: 21)

## Ten principles of effective teaching and learning

1. Equips learners for life in its broadest sense.
2. Engages with valued forms of knowledge.
3. Recognises the importance of prior experience and learning.
4. Requires the tutor to 'scaffold' learning.
5. Uses assessment as a means of advancing learning.
6. Promotes the active engagement of the learner.
7. Fosters both individual and social processes and outcomes.
8. Recognises the significance of informal learning.
9. Depends on and encourages tutors continuing to learn.
10. Demands consistent policy frameworks with support for teaching and learning as their primary focus.

Source: adapted from James and Pollard (2006)

The academic strategy and this understanding of teaching was from the beginning supported by the view that inner-London required a specific response. Transformation in teaching and learning on its own was insufficient in this context. Meeting the needs of inner-London students also required an innovative curriculum which transcended the traditional vocational or A level offer and 'brought the present into the future'. This recognised that students at College X needed preparing for the study demands and for the habitus of university life.

In order to promote the academic strategy and specifically the teaching and learning agenda, the middle management or head of department role was transformed so that it now became the management of the academic strategy or of academic change. The Professional development unit was formed in 2002 to work with heads of department to lead the development of teaching and learning and implement the academic strategy in the classroom.

The unit was a virtual unit with no location and no staff other than me but my role was to lead academic change in the college by promoting reflection on teaching and learning. It was decided right from the beginning that this would be achieved through action learning cycles based on the concrete experience of inner-London teachers. Although I invited external experts in to present sessions on differentiation the emphasis was on the understanding and expertise that existed in the institution. The PDU promoted reflection by:

- Organising colloquia on independence, E learning, student motivation, formative assessment, questioning techniques and differentiation
- Organising representatives from each department to develop a professional development model for inner-London FE teachers.
- Twinning departments to share effective practice in teaching and learning
- The development of accredited projects with the work-based learning unit at a local

University focused on teaching and learning and change. Work was being done on independence, coaching for leadership, educational marketing and leadership of change.

As it was the role of middle managers to promote the academic strategy and it is a key element within 'Success for All,' the role of the Professional Development Unit was also to create a model for developing leaders of this academic change in an inner-London FE context. The creation of a suitable internal leadership programme became a key responsibility of the unit.

Just as there was an academic strategy there was emanating from the school sector a 4-part description of what leadership of academic change should aim for at College X:

- Conversation (professional dialogue)
- Capacity building
- Climate change
- Consistency.

The role of the head of the PDU was then to promote the academic strategy and its leadership, by working with heads of department to develop them as leaders and staff to develop them as teachers in an inner-London context. The strategy by which this was to be achieved was action learning, so methodological approach was already being adopted by the college.

### **HE Coordinator at College X**

As my involvement with academic change in the FE sector has developed one role at the college remained constant. As HE coordinator I developed an understanding of the learning demands of the university sector and the importance of widening participation and the increased social inclusion it can deliver. My work one day a week for 2 years at QMUL as an excellence fellow has furthermore increased the sophistication of my understanding of the demands of widening participation and helped me understand the challenges inner-London students confront when facing the 'habitus' particularly of a selective university. My model of the purpose of academic change for inner-London 16-19 students also includes the need to prepare them for university study.

Since the conservative, liberal democrat coalition has come to power there is an even more compelling case for excellent leadership of academic change in inner London Colleges. Young people now need not only preparing for the habitus of university life but also for the chance to go to university as it becomes more and more expensive to study and the grades required for access to university are further inflated. It may even be that university straight after BTEC or A levels is no longer the best option for some and institutions need to become more skilled at giving appropriate guidance and advice.

The roles of head of the professional development unit and HE co-ordinator are related in as far as academic change and the leadership of academic change are focused on

increasing the life chances and social mobility of inner-London students

### **Manager for learning at College X**

When the principal responsible for the academic strategy left the College the new principal abandoned the academic strategy as for her it symbolised an approach that was too abstract and intellectual. The role of head of PDU was to inevitably disappear as was the leadership programme which was the original focus of this work. After much negotiating I became manager for learning as well as remaining HE co-ordinator. This role was also focused on academic change but reflected a new pragmatic, managerial approach to change. I was less responsible for development and more responsible for lesson observation, report writing and policy writing. It was a performance management and quality assurance role. The developmental, quality improvement work of the college was transferred to a group of teaching and learning champions. I worked with these 'advanced practitioners' but no longer ran 'colloquia'.

### **Head of Higher Education at College X**

I would have liked to combine a more developmental lesson observation role with a staff development focus but as this was not possible I took on the role of Head of Higher Education, knowing it was temporary but believing with some hubris that I could make it permanent. This role allowed me to maintain my interest in widening participation and also to manage two college initiatives that reflected the focus on a specific curriculum to meet the need of inner-London students: a retail foundation degree in partnership with John Lewis and a local University and a programme called Fast Forward based on OCN units and designed to facilitate access to university for students who had underachieved at AS level. The role would come to an end because both of these programme were to be closed because of changes in qualification requirements and the machinery of government transfer of sixth form colleges into the school sector. I was not to make the role permanent

### **Quality Improvement manager at College Y**

Just as I was negotiating a new role for myself at College X I was promoted to a role at College Y that allowed me to synthesise all the understanding I had developed in the contrasting roles as head of PDU and manger for learning. I delivered staff development and organised lesson observation. I also became responsible for equality and diversity in the College.

Perhaps the most significant event for me was the retirement of my line manager soon after I had started. This meant that I had to take on senior management responsibility beyond my level. I wrote parts of the College's self-assessment and was Ofsted nominee when Ofsted came in May 2010. This meant that I had to prepare the College for the visit and represent the College with the Ofsted team when they visited. It was an opportunity to respond successfully to the national performance management and quality improvement culture, while still developing a localised context specific approach to

change.

## **Subject specialism**

### **Teacher of French and Philosophy**

Any involvement with academic change requires a continuing engagement with the students who are the focus of that change. It has always been important to me to continue to teach so that my other roles were not abstract for me. I have had on a daily basis students in front of me whose work ethic needs improving, who are interested in achieving a qualification rather than developing an understanding of a subject, and whose independence and scholastic skills are insufficient for success both at sixth form college and at university in the future. I also have daily experience of the sometimes severe difficulties that inner-London students confront in their home lives.

The influence of my role as teacher, however, is not limited to this practical understanding. The experience of teaching languages has convinced me that all teaching is teaching of a new language. I believe that language teaching methodology is at the heart of all effective pedagogy and I have used the techniques acquired teaching French to run training sessions for colleagues and to teach Philosophy.

Teaching Philosophy has also been influential but in a different way. Teaching Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics as part of the philosophy syllabus has reinforced in me a teleological approach to my work, that is to say that it leads me to believe that my work makes sense in the context of a target or purpose. According to Aristotle if there is not a supreme good at which all actions aim then all actions are pointless.

'Suppose then that the things achievable in action have some end that we wish for because of itself, and because of which we wish for the other things, and that we do not choose everything because of something else – for if we do, it will go on without limit, so the desire will prove to be empty and futile. Clearly this end will be the good, that is to say the supreme good (1094a18-22)

Aristotle identifies the supreme good with eudemonia or a flourishing life, in which reason, the unique function of a human being, is given its fullest expression. The exercise of reason involves the development of both moral and intellectual virtues. Aristotle invites us to ask the question: 'what actions and what moral and intellectual virtues would lead to a flourishing life?' It is easy to see how this would apply to this project. Teaching and leadership are given focus if understood within the framework of a target or focus, which would be to become a flourishing inner-London sixth form college. To create such a college the shared moral and intellectual virtues underpinning pedagogy and leadership need to be identified.

It is of course possible to suggest that Aristotle's vision only applies to a coherent world of shared values such as the Athenian city state for which Aristotle was writing. Alisdair Macintyre (2006:39), a contemporary Aristotelian, claims in fact that such coherent

societies no longer exist.

‘By contrast the societies of modernity presuppose that we have agreed to disagree about a wide range of questions about goods and that politics is one thing and morals quite another.

Is it therefore possible to find such communities of Aristotelian practice anywhere in contemporary milieus?’

Macintyre answers his own question by saying that such communities can be found ‘in the forms of various local enterprises: households, fishing crews, farming cooperatives, schools, clinics, neighbourhoods, small towns’.

Developing a shared telos would be for me a key goal for the leadership of change in inner-London Sixth form colleges.

### **The influence of my roles on methodology**

My roles therefore influence my methodology. Firstly I would be happy with an approach that identified the telos of the organisation. Secondly there was a theoretical position exemplified in the PDU, the academic strategy and ‘bringing the future into the present’ that stasis was to be avoided and that change was necessary. Thirdly there was an assumption that inner-London focused leadership skills existed and needed to be developed. Finally there was a methodological assumption, focused on action learning in the way in which the professional development unit functioned. These positions can be summarised in the following ways:

1. Any college needed to identify its purpose and the virtues or competencies that would help it to achieve its purpose.
2. Academic change was necessary and particularly for students in inner-London who might lack the necessary skills as well as the social and cultural capital for success. This meant that teaching and learning strategies needed to be adopted and curriculum initiatives needed to be pursued that met the needs of all students and developed their autonomy. At the same time academic change involved preparing students for university. The methodologies that I felt were most effective were based on ideas from foreign language teaching.
3. Academic change required genuine inner-London focused leadership, which ideally would be modelled by all and dispersed throughout an organisation
4. Action learning based on the experience of staff at the college was the most effective methodology to produce results. This would be more effective than relatively context independent programmes

My subsequent roles have not changed my views on this at all. However I would now add that it is necessary to adopt pragmatic approaches to change which accept the need to respond to context independent scrutiny from Ofsted and to 'surf the dialectic' or 'close the loop' between national FE priorities and local needs.

### **Problems and boundaries for the success of the project because of my roles**

While the success of the project could be undermined by this role-induced subjectivity, my initial position at College X, within the hierarchy of the college was potentially a more significant limitation. As a middle manager I might have been seen to have insufficient leverage to achieve the goals of promoting academic change and developing a leadership programme. I was directly line managed in my role by the principal of the college but by placing academic change in the hands of the academic management team and the PDU he had excluded the senior management team from its implementation. They were unsurprisingly suspicious of my role and did not necessarily support it with colleagues. The project therefore took place without the involvement or support of influential senior managers.

The teaching staff, for reasons described earlier, can resist academic change and invoke the desire for professional autonomy. 'The immediate' in the guise of paper work and bureaucratic deadlines can mean that any focus on innovation and change is too easily side-lined and resistance to change becomes an easier position to adopt if change is not being supported by powerful interest groups in an organisation. Any questions that might be asked about the impact of the work were also made more difficult by the small number of participants in the leadership programme.

Finally the leadership of change is not just about professional development. It is also about quality improvement through performance management. As head of the PDU I was not at all involved with internal inspection and lesson observation and thus with the strategies for measuring performance, which ignore the inner-London focus of the academic strategy. Academic change strategies at College X needed to be able to 'surf the dialectic' as the then principal then called it or 'close the loop' as the subsequent principal called it, between the academic strategy, and professional development, which were inner-London focused and performance management which was increasingly context independent. Any project that failed to do this might not succeed.

It is clear then that while the role offered me a privileged position to investigate models for developing the leadership of academic change in an inner-London sixth form college, there were also tensions in my role and the college that at the very least made the success of my project less likely.

The role I took on after the demise of the second leadership programme with its focus on performance management still left me unable fully to 'surf the dialectic between the context independent and the context dependent because I had no developmental role this time. Also I was still in middle management role.

Once I moved to College Y several of the limitations of my role were however removed. I had been promoted and had significantly more leverage although I was still not a senior manager. There was no resistance to the change agenda from the senior management team and little resistance from the wider staff. I also had professional development, performance management and quality improvement roles so that 'surfing the dialectic' was possible. My higher position in the hierarchy and my sympathy with the approach to leadership and change that I found at College Y, however, could have made me more prone to role-induced subjectivity and insufficient objectivity about that approach.

## **Research approach**

My research methodology needed to accommodate a changing national context, local needs and the advantages and potential problems associated with my roles. I recognise the value of quantitative analysis in education and can understand its use, for example, in longitudinal statistical analysis of educational trends. I also understand its relevance in measuring student exam performance and establishing targets. For the focus of this project I however chose qualitative approaches and supported the kind of approach already adopted by the PDU at College X for the following reasons

Qualitative approaches are in fact better adapted to responding to the process of change inherent in educational settings. Quantitative approaches, on the other hand, are based on a biased or fixed operationalisation of concepts. If, for example, measures of success are being quantitatively analysed, how does the researcher accommodate the changing task of FE as what educational success means in an inner London context evolves? Qualitative approaches, therefore, seem appropriate to deal with the indexicality (a representation is always linked to a particular setting and time) and inconcludability (accounts are never conclusive) of complex work based situations. (Johnson 1999), which involve an evolving sector and professional role as well as different settings

Academic change and leadership, which are the focus of this project, are also not amenable to quantitative analysis, although ultimately changes in these aspects must lead to measurably improved success for students, which can be quantitatively analysed by organisations such as Ofsted. Qualitative approaches allow for the view, based on a constructivist epistemology, that researching a complex educational setting involves responding to changing 'networks of assumptions and inter-subjective meanings' (Gill and Johnson 2002). In other words there is not a reality to research distinct from the subjective understandings and contributions of all those who share a work place.

Even if quantitative research successfully describes a complex situation it does not provide specific guidance for what ought to be done about that situation. Some qualitative approaches, such as action learning on the other hand are focused on change and improvement in practice. Quantitative research and external scrutiny can, however, allow for a process of triangulation in which the value of evidence generated by qualitative analysis is reinforced or challenged. Ofsted inspections and exam results in general represent that kind of test of qualitative approaches to change,



## Case Study

Given the need to focus on the values of participants and the need to accommodate changing contexts or more technically expressed, indexicality and inconcludability, it seemed that the case study approach to the investigation of the necessary ingredients for the development of the leadership of academic change in inner- London was the most appropriate. According to Hitchcock and Hughes (1995: 317) a case study will have the following characteristics:

- 'A concern with the rich and vivid description of events within the case
- A chronological narrative of events within the case
- An internal debate between the description of events and the analysis of events
- A focus upon individual actors or groups of actors and their perceptions
- A focus on particular events within the case
- The integral involvement of the researcher in the case

All the above characteristics apply to this project. Its focus was in the beginning a unique action learning, leadership programme underpinned by shared theoretical agreement on the possibility of change, the nature of academic change in inner London and understanding of the need for the development of future programme. It involves a group of individuals and requires 'the integral involvement of the researcher.'

Cohen, Manion, Morrison: (2000: 181) suggest that case studies 'investigate and report the complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance'. Yin (2009:130) also suggests that the case study benefits from prior theoretical propositions to guide collections of data and analysis 'The (theoretical) proposition also helps to organise the entire case study and to define alternative explanations to be examined.' The case study seems the perfect approach where personal values, prior theoretical positions, unique contexts, national educational transformation and future planning intersect

The qualitative case study can in fact be seen as the approach that best suits an educational context as according to Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) 'its principal rationale is to reproduce social action in its natural setting, i.e. classrooms and work places, and that it can be used either to test existing theory or practice in an everyday environment, or it can be used to develop new theory or improve and evaluate existing professional practice.' The aim of the leadership programme was to apply leadership and change theory to genuine educational situations and improve leadership practice in the college. Although the case study focused on the two leadership programme at College X, subsequent experiences at College Y give me a better retrospective understanding of the leadership programme at College X and increased the richness of the case study.

## **Action learning**

The approach that was largely adopted in the leadership programme case study at both colleges was perhaps inevitably the action learning approach, which had already been the fundamental approach of the professional development unit. Action learning is also appropriate for a case study as these are grounded in the description and analysis of actions taking place in professional settings. Action learning is also problem focused and aims at improvement and by definition action. It takes participants through the following four stages:

- Defining problem situation to be improved
- Design intervention
- Implement intervention
- Evaluate impact of intervention
- Design new more effective intervention

Action Learning seems clearly to be suitable for educational contexts in general and for this project in particular. It is based on the idea that everybody in an educational community has expertise so the researcher is not the expert but learns from the experience of others of the problem situations. The collaborative relationships implied by this approach are therefore not hierarchical. This in turn will reduce the possibility that participants in action learning will respond only to what they think the institution requires of them and will resist dominant discourses. It should start with the ‘authentic experience’ of the participants and develop an evaluative, reflective culture, which is necessary for action and change in an educational context.

There are also benefits to action learning because of the ways in which adults learn. According to Knowles (1980) and Dallellew (1988) quoted in *Changing our Schools* (Stoll and Fink, 1995:154), adult learning is ‘problem centred and wants to apply what it learns immediately to solve specific problems.’ Also traditional training’ is inadequate to deal with the nature of change in understanding and practice expected in education.’ Consequently staff development should be focused on ‘critical, reflective thinking, helping learners examine cultural and organisational assumptions as well as their own practice’ and ‘encourage problem posing and problem solving, as closely connected as possible to learners’ real problems.

Action learning is also appropriate for this case study as I am researching my own practice and investigating how to improve my ability to manage and construct leadership programme. Whitehead and McNiff (2006: 13) contrast social science research and some forms of action research with action research as they understand it.

‘The theory generated is the researcher’s theory about other people, so it is the researcher’s theory that goes into the public domain. ....In action research, the focus swings away from the spectator researcher and onto the practitioner researchers.

In this case study I am very much a practitioner researcher investigating my own practice in the domain under investigation alongside others investigating their own practice.

### **Action Learning in the College X phase of the Case Study**

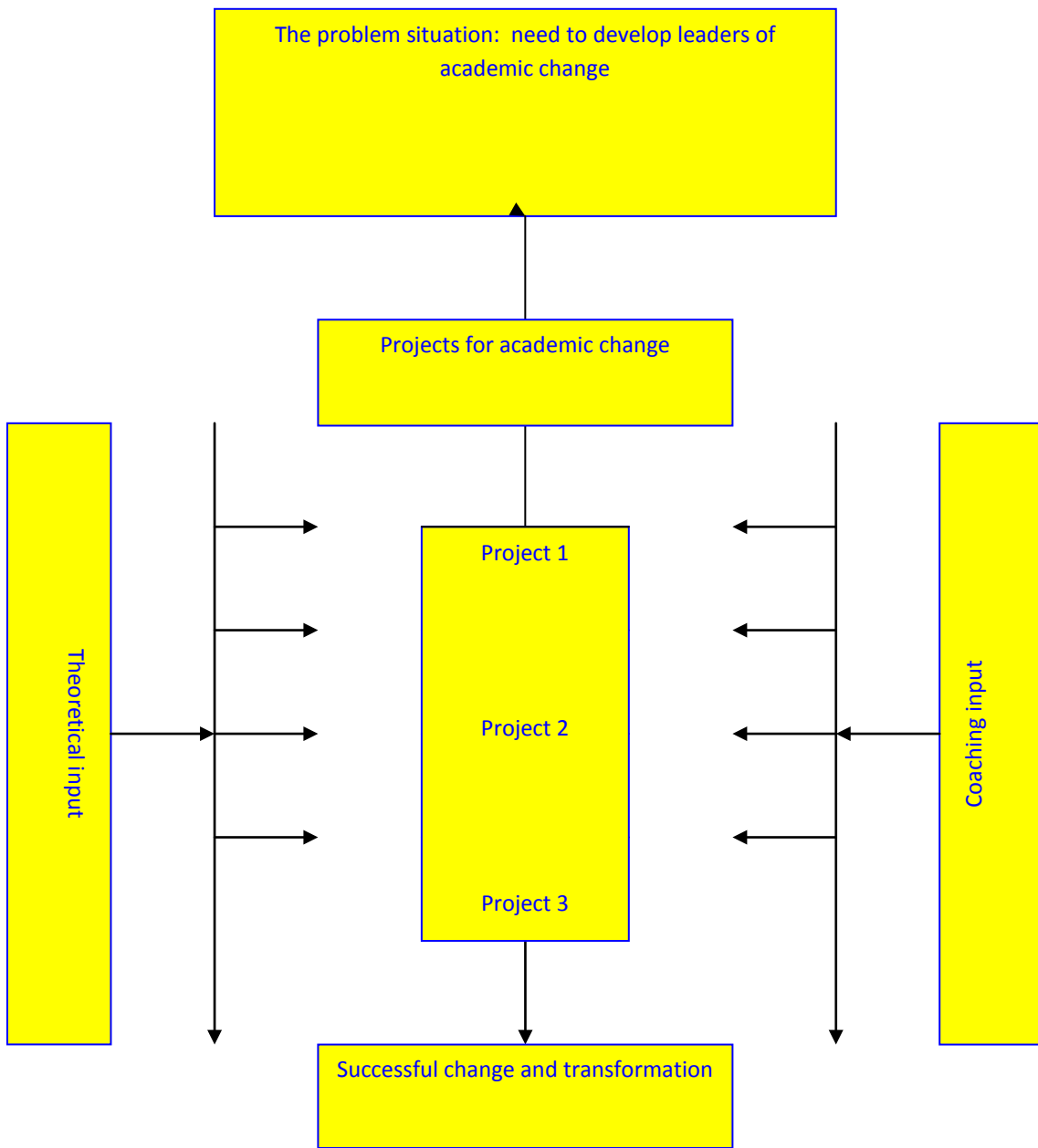
The specific stages of the action learning cycle in the College X leadership programme took place in the following way:

Defining the problem: the need for change and the succession crisis

For this stage there was readily available quantitative, college based and national data. As has been mentioned earlier the 2002 Ofsted inspection had identified excellent teaching at the college but student performance did not reflect this. Some kind of academic change was therefore necessary not only to improve student performance but also for the college to fulfil its widening participation role of increasing social mobility for its students. Furthermore nationally the leaders of further education were approaching retirement and this was also true of the senior management at College X. As this project is being written three senior managers have recently retired and two more are about to do so. The problem was to develop a new generation of managers to lead academic change in the college and to widen participation for inner-London students.

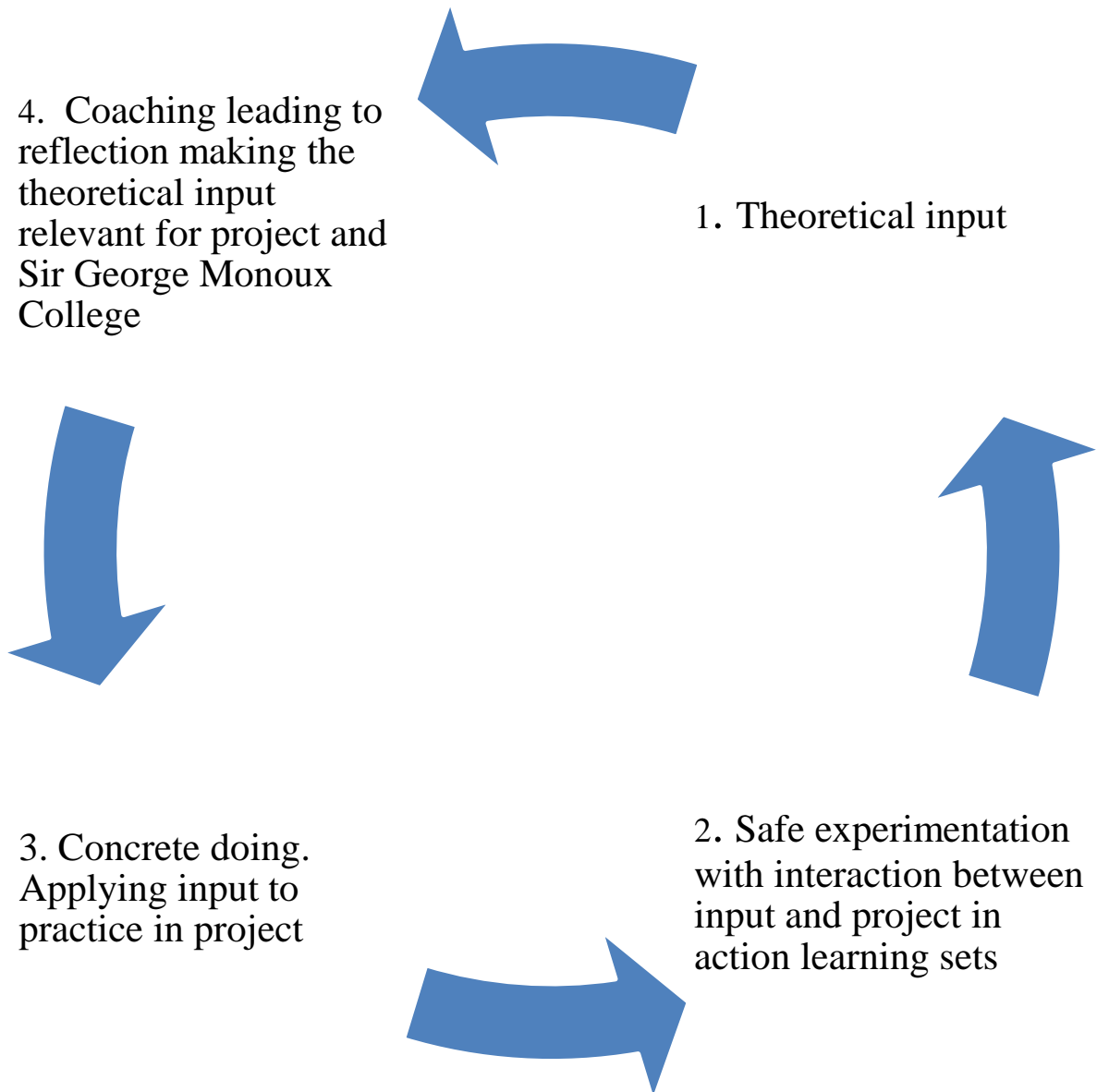
Designing the intervention: leadership programme 1

The intervention was designed in a series of meetings between the Principal of the college at the time, the head of the PDU and a leadership consultant and coach from the i-coach academy based at a local university. It was decided for the reasons given above to follow an action learning cycle based on individual academic change projects for the participants, on theoretical input about personal change, organisational culture and change and leadership and on coaching. The intervention can be illustrated in the following diagram



**Diagram 1:** Action learning model for programme 1

The design of the programme can also be represented using the Kolb cycle.



**Diagram 2:** Kolb Cycle

### **Implementing the intervention**

Three middle managers were selected and asked to identify academic change projects in order to go through the leadership programme. Two further managers were identified to develop internal coaching expertise. A middle manager in the project would therefore go through the following process:

1. A theoretical input session
2. An action learning set chaired by one of the internal coaches
3. Concrete doing/activity focused on improvement project
4. Internal coaching followed by i-coach academy input
5. A short piece of reflective writing given to the manager for the project, the head of the PDU.

The two internal coaches did not have any internal coaching while the head of the PDU only received input from the consultant on the future content of the programme.

Each of the actors had the following roles.

<b>Actor</b>	<b>Project</b>
The principal	The sponsorship of the programme
Consultant, i-coach academy	Leadership and change input and guidance and interaction with the head of PDU
Coach, i-coach academy	Developing the coaching skills of Middle Manager 1 and 2 and coaching Middle Manager 3, 4 and 5
Myself as head of the PDU	Management of the programme and the development of model for a leadership programme appropriate for SGM
Middle Manager 1	Development of internal coaching expertise
Middle Manager 2	Development of internal coaching expertise
Middle Manager 3	The development of a teaching and learning focus within a department
Middle Manager 4	The introduction of curriculum change
Middle Manager 5	The introduction of a more distributive model of leadership in a department.

**Table1:** participant roles

### **Data collection and analysis**

The case study draws upon my own experience as an active agent in the design and implementation of this first action learning programme and is supplemented by a range of data emerging from participant response and experience of the programme. The reflections from programme 1 were to constitute the primary data for this case study and the source of its attempt to answer the key research questions focused on the impact and ingredients of a successful leadership programme. The idea was also that the data collected from the reflection and evaluation of the programme would feed directly into the design for the new intervention or programme 2 and that data from future

programmes would be compared to that of the first programme to continue refining the leadership programme and to answer the key research questions.

The outcomes of discussions between participants in the first programme designed to rectify its perceived shortcomings also constituted an essential source of data, including the design of an application form that itself became a source of data. According to McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (2003:11) collaborative discussion about the research question is an essential phase of action learning:

‘So the claim is not regarded simply as an opinion, it is necessary to obtain feedback from others about the validity of the claim’

Yin (2009: 69) argued that in order to successfully collect case study data the researcher needs to be able to ‘ask good questions, be a good listener not trapped by his or her own ideologies and preconceptions, be adaptive and flexible, so that newly encountered situations can be seen as opportunities not threats, have a firm grasp of the issues being studied and be sensitive and responsive to contradictory evidence’. All these guidelines have been important in this case study but I have had particularly to demonstrate ‘adaptability and flexibility as scenarios and circumstances changed. The programme was to be abandoned after its second cycle, so that there would be no data from discussions about the shortcomings of the second programme. It was necessary therefore to be flexible and to replace the discussions that took place at the end of the first programme with interviews at the end of the programme to research participants’ views on the shortcomings of the programme and their suggestions for an improved programme. Yin (2009: 106) in fact identifies interviews in the form of ‘guided conversations’ as an important source of case study information.

Strauss and Corbin (1998: 34) also argue for the possibility of a constructive combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches, suggesting this will ‘enhance the research process’ Both College X and College Y are subject to Ofsted inspections which while subjective in nature are also informed by quantitative data in the form of exam results and success rates. While acknowledging the difficulty of demonstrating cause and effect, the success of any proposed programme to develop leaders of academic change in inner-London sixth form colleges, emerging from this case study, should be demonstrated by improved institutional performance.

Strauss and Corbin (1998: 43-44) say that objectivity can be enhanced by thinking ‘comparatively’ and using literature and experience to ‘stimulate our thinking about properties or dimensions that we can then use to examine the data in front of us’. They also emphasise the importance of ‘multiple viewpoints’. The validity of data analysis is thus increased by cross-referencing or triangulating the reflective data from the first leadership programme against other sources of data such as the second leadership programme. The analysis is then enriched by comparing the findings to leadership programme experiences at College Y and the outcomes of Ofsted inspections in the relevant period of time.

The data for this case study was therefore collected from:

- The written reflections of participants ( see chapter 4 and appendix 1 form Cii, Di)
- The discussion of participants about the nature of an innovative organisation and the shortcomings of the first programme and recommendations for programme 2 (see chapter 4 and 6)
- Application forms for programme 2 (see chapter 7 and appendix 1 form AF8)
- Interviews at the end of programme 2 (see chapter 7 and appendix 1 forms Qi and Qv)
- Ofsted reports from Colleges X and Y

During my time at College Y, although there was no further data generated by reflection, I was able to develop my response to the research questions by comparing and contrasting my experience of different models of leadership programme with my findings from college X. It is in fact important to reiterate the fact that my own role as an active participant in the case study has been a key element in the process of making sense of data. Hitchcock and Hughes (95: 298) claim that that the researcher's theoretical sensitivity is essential to be able to understand what is significant in the data and therefore to an ability to be able to analyse it. It has two sources which are 'technical literature and professional and personal experience.' Sensitivity to the issues in an action learning case study develops as the data is collected, wider reading is generated and professional experience and understanding grows.

It would be erroneous to assume that the process of analysis begins once the data has been collected. According to Watling and James with Briggs (2012:382), 'the analysis of data, particularly of qualitative data, takes place throughout the project. It is an iterative and persistent part of the research process.' The design of the original leadership programme described above depends on prior analysis of the material and strategies available for such leadership programmes. There is an initial theoretical assumption that leadership programmes of that kind are necessary which is tested against multiple viewpoints, including the literature, in order to produce a new theory about the nature of successful leadership programmes. This new theory develops as the data emerges, so the data in this case study is analysed for responses that contribute to a developing answer to the key research questions.

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) organising analysis by research question is;

'A very useful way of organising data for the exact issue of concern to the researcher and preserves the coherence of the material. ....In this approach all the relevant data from various data streams (interviews, observations, questionnaires etc.) are collated to provide a collective answer to a research question.'

Yin (2009:130) also identifies 'relying on theoretical propositions' as a preferred strategy



for analysing data in case study research, as it allows you to ‘focus attention on certain data and ignore other data’. It is therefore worthwhile re-iterating the theoretical propositions that inform the analysis of this case study.

- Leadership programmes help improve practice
- The ingredients of programme 1 would be useful for participants
- Collaborative action learning is a good way to improve practice
- The Kolb cycle is an effective way to structure action learning and to integrate theory and practice
- Coaching is an effective change strategy
- Reflection is an important professional skill
- There is a degree of agency available to both staff and students
- Academic change is needed and should be informed by moral/political purpose
- That purpose is specifically linked to an inner-London context

While I was an active agent in the design and implementation of this case study the above list of theoretical assumptions came very much from the sponsor and consultant of the programme. The findings in chapter 10 that emerged from the data, my theoretical sensitivity and professional experience represent my own current theoretical assumptions about the purpose and contents of effective leadership programmes.

The analytical decisions I have taken throughout this case study, the testimony of participants I have chosen to include in chapters 4, 6 and 7 and my understanding of my experience at college Y are selected according to the extent to which they confirm or contradict the initial theoretical assumptions listed above, so that better programmes can be designed. For example I would seek responses to coaching from the reflective data from programme 1 or 2 to judge whether or not it is an effective tool for developing leaders. If the ingredients of the programme didn’t stimulate reflection I would seek explanations for this. I would also seek theoretical insights to explain less successful aspects of the programme from wider reading. Coffey and Atkinson (1996:110) emphasise the importance of reading in qualitative research.

‘An active and analysis-oriented approach to “the literature” is an important part of the recurrent process of reflection and interpretation. Glaser and Strauss (1967) commend the creative use of written sources, including published studies, in the production of analytical concepts.’

In work-based learning however the primary source of data for analysis is research into one’s own practice and the experience of others researching their practice. Work-based learning generates reading and theoretical questions that inform the analysis but those questions need to be pursued in appropriate depth elsewhere.

## **Reflections on being an insider researcher**

Strauss and Corbin (1998:42) suggest that ‘the researcher is shaped by the data just as the data is shaped by the researcher’, leading to a problem of maintaining a balance between objectivity and sensitivity as the data is analysed. The value of the data analysis in this case study and action learning approach can still therefore be problematic and be further undermined by my position as an insider researcher. I have already mentioned my location in the hierarchy at College X and Y. This leads to the danger that participants may resist honesty in the reflections that they give me because they don’t want to be too critical of the programme which I manage and which was originally designed by the consultant and the sponsor. The collaborative nature of action learning will to some extent reduce this problem because reflections on the programme are shared and negotiated. However where data is generated by application forms, interviews and reflective journals, participants need to feel confident that their reflections cannot be identified and that they can say what they feel and not what is expected of them.

The ethics of practitioner research is therefore important. Yin (2009:73) says that case study research should involve:

‘Gaining informed consent, protecting participants from harm, including avoiding the use of any deception, and protecting privacy and confidentiality.’

This report also meets key aspects of the ‘tests of respect for persons’ in case study research, identified by Bassey (2012: 168) by ‘concealing the contributing individuals and the particular setting of the research in the case report’ and requesting ‘permission to publish the case report’.

All participants were informed that I would be writing a report based on their reflections and were offered the option to withhold their reflection from me and from the report I was to produce. (See appendix 2 for presentation to cohort 2 in which their permission for participation in this project was requested). They were also guaranteed anonymity. In order to protect their identity, the reflections of each participant in programme 1 were to be given a letter (A, B, C etc.). In programme 2 application forms were coded by form (AF1, AF2 etc.), reflections were coded by number (2i, 2ii etc.) and interviews analysed and coded by participant (Qi to Qvi). The decision was also taken to refer to an inner-London borough and to college X and Y to ‘conceal the setting of the research’.

It is worth adding here that no participant did withhold their reflection and that generally in educational institutions there is a shared moral purpose which means that staff wish to contribute to any attempt to improve their experience and the experience of students. There was little need to negotiate with them about my position as an insider researcher and their willingness to contribute to my project

It is however inherent to the insider researcher position, that the selection of data may be

seen as partial and that reflection in this case study is unwittingly influenced by dominant organisational values. That is not to say that research, whether quantitative or qualitative, can ever be 'objective' if objective means value free. Hitchcock and Hughes (95: 53) point out that Weber had argued that all research is contaminated by the researcher:

'It is through values that particular issues are defined or studied. Actually the 'scientific method' with its emphasis on neutrality was itself a held value'

The fear is that if research is not 'value free' its outcomes can be used in the service of power or in the interests of specific groups. This is satirized by Anderson at the beginning of her 1995 paper 'Knowledge, Human Interests, and Objectivity in Feminist Epistemology' (in Introduction to Philosophy: 284) by her use of a soviet joke:

Apparatchik (impatiently). How much is 2+2?

Mathematician (cautiously). How much do you want it to be?

While research is not value free, in the name of the validity of data it is nevertheless important to resist bias as far as possible. McNiff (2005) suggests that the critical awareness of participants must enable them to distinguish between 'their first-hand engagement with authentic lived reality and first-hand engagement with lived experience of constructed reality.' Qualitative approaches must start from the values of the participants and not from constructions resulting from dominant discourses within organisations.

Data generated by the kind of participant reflection fundamental to the leadership programme can in fact also be problematic in this respect: Fenwick in Expanding Conceptions of Experiential learning (2000) suggests that the assumption in 'constructivist' views of reflection, which inform the Kolb cycle in particular, in which the individual is cast as 'as a central actor in a drama of personal meaning making' ignore not only the role of power but also that of desire in one's ability to create meaning through reflection. Participants may not be as free to reflect and learn as the process suggests they are.

It is important to be aware of these limitations and to resist them where possible. In 'Philosophy of Educational Research' (2000), Pring suggests that there will be greater impartiality if research is submitted to critical review both from within the institution being researched and from outsiders, such as representatives of academia. He also suggests, adopting the Aristotelian concept of virtues, a set of intellectual virtues governing research, which include:

- Openness to criticism
- An interest in clarity and communication
- A concern for evidence
- The courage to produce research that runs counter to the interests of the sponsor

Similarly Whitehead and McNiff (2006) claim that in practitioner research.' Research,

will be valid if informed by ontological, epistemological, methodological and pedagogical values. By ontological values they mean a 'theory of being' (2006: 22-23) or how we perceive ourselves as existing with others. If we perceive ourselves as part of a community then we will see knowledge as being created with 'other people who are also creating their own knowledge'. This epistemological perspective will in turn lead to methodological choices which would lead to the testing of 'provisional understandings against the critique of others' and being open to 'new possibilities and resistant to closure.' We need to 'live our values in our practice' and make our values our 'standard of judgement.' (2006: 82). It is to be hoped that my values are 'lived' in this case study and that my concern form evidence and the opinion of others is clear.

## **Conclusion**

Coffey and Atkinson suggest that abductive reasoning (1996:155) is most suitable analytical approach for this kind of qualitative research because 'abductive inferences seek to go beyond the data themselves, to locate them in explanatory or interpretive frameworks'. It is to be hoped that in this case study, the interplay of locally generated data, developing professional experience, the views of colleagues and the ideas of others leads to findings that are valid and as far as possible resist any problems associated with the insider researcher. This analysis will then answer the research questions it set out to ask. It will identify the ingredients of a successful leadership programme for inner-London Colleges that might apply in other organisations. It will do so tentatively, as befits an attempt to research a question, which offers no simple answer.

## **CHAPTER 3 THE FIRST LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME 2004-5.**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter I will describe in a non-evaluative way the experience and theoretical content of the first leadership programme. It was an experiment to see if it could work and to lead to the creation of an appropriate leadership programme for the college. As the head of the PDU I had to participate and the idea was also that the two internal coaches were to be part of the future leadership of the college. The three heads of department who participated were chosen because they cared about their students and the success or failure of their departments and were pragmatic adapters to change. It should be said however that they were not particularly ambitious and all had interests and focuses outside of work. Their commitment was however impressive and the content sessions took place from 5pm to 7pm on Wednesday evenings

Not only did the participants give up some Wednesday evenings, they were also expected to give up time during the working week for internal and external coaching, as well as for action learning sets. Coaching, according to (Megginson and Clutterbuck 2005) is designed to help participants fulfil their potential and achieve their goals by:

- Setting goals
- Dealing with roadblocks
- Stimulating creative thinking
- Helping them decide what to do
- Making them commit to action.

Action learning sets, which represented the safe experimentation phase of the experiential cycle followed the following sequence:

- Presenter states issue relating to project and theoretical input
- Issue is clarified by questioning from other participants (no opinions to be expressed. The learning set proceeds only through questioning)
- The issue is restated by presenter.
- Participants write down pertinent questions.
- Presenter copies questions and selects 3 to 5 for immediate discussion based on further questioning
- Presenter commits to action, for next time.

Participants in action learning sets also need to contract to attendance and punctuality for the set to function properly. In the context of the leadership programme both coaching and action learning sets were designed to link the theoretical input of the programme with

the concrete doing in the projects that each middle manager had committed to at the beginning of the programme.

In between content sessions I would meet with the principal and the consultant to review progress and plan for the next phase. The theoretical input was primarily the choice of the consultant and was not critically analysed but was reviewed only for the degree to which it was effective in generating a response from participants and helping them understand leadership.

As this was an experiment not only did the rest of the college not participate in any aspect of the programme they also were not supposed to know about it. Its existence was an arcane mystery to others and to the participants it felt like a secret society. Most significantly the Senior Management Team was kept in the dark about its contents and purpose.

### **Induction. Session 1**

The participants having been invited to participate gathered at the university for the induction session. We were introduced to the concepts of the Kolb cycle, action learning and coaching but the primary purpose of the induction was to understand the purpose of the programme and provide us with theoretical tools for understanding:

1. The nature of personal change
2. The nature of the institution in which we worked
3. The relationship between systems, individuals, vision and leadership

### **The purpose of the programme**

This was introduced by the principal who was the sponsor of the programme. He stated that a leadership programme at College X was necessary because:

1. morally we owed it to our students to become better
2. we needed to be accountable for what we do
3. it was necessary to surf the dialectic between the needs College X students and the demands of the sector
4. we had to prepare for succession in the College as the existing Senior Management team were relatively soon to retire.

The Principal also suggested that academic leadership behaviours needed to be based on promoting professional conversation, building capacity in the team, creating a climate in which change was possible and developing consistency.

The purpose of the programme was of course also leadership and there was a focus on leaders we admired, such as Mandela and what that meant about the attributes of leaders.

### **The Management of Personal Change**

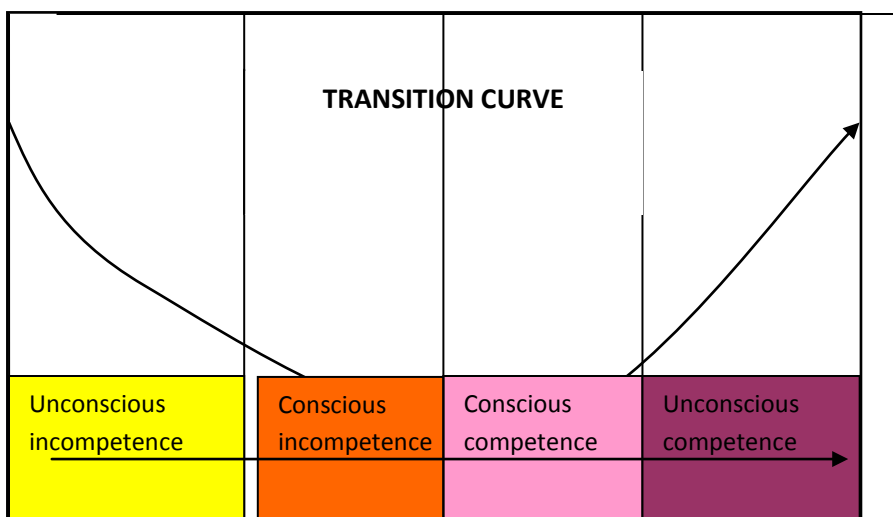
The consultant began by asking us to share with other members of the group our expectations of the programme and, as a mechanism for bonding, breaking down barriers and preparing participants for the openness that was needed for coaching, to share a personal failure with the rest of the group.

The initial focus was on models of personal change and development. This was because the participants were to go through a period of change themselves and so that the participants could understand the processes that their teams might go through in achieving the goals that had been identified in their projects. The models of change were also supposed to help the participants understand the levels of support that colleagues would need as they underwent a process of change.

Initially we were asked to share with the group a past failure. This was designed to develop bonds in the group and to indicate that personal change and learning could emerge from moments of discomfort. It is also a common theme in work on leadership that failure is not only acceptable but an essential part of organisational learning and development.

### **The Transition Curve**

We were then presented with the transition curve in which illustrates what can happen through a period of change. Workers move from unconscious incompetence in the new world with which they are confronted, through a period of realisation in which they are guided to an awareness of their incompetence and then through self-aware competence to unconscious competence, which is deemed to be a desirable sign that change has successfully been achieved. (See diagram below).



**Diagram 3: Transition curve**

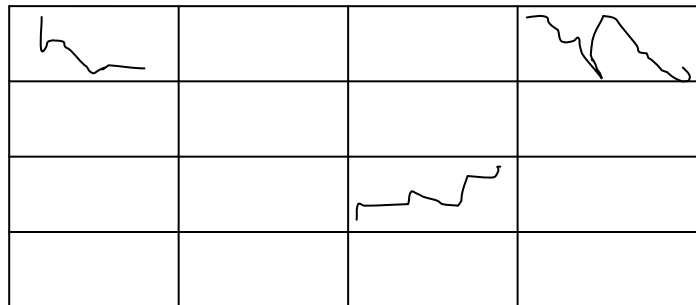
The transition curve is particularly useful for identifying the level and nature of support required at each stage.

<b>Transition Phase</b>	<b>Intervention required.</b>
Unconscious incompetence	Honest supportive feedback
Conscious incompetence	Regular support and guidance. Sensitivity to resentment/anger etc.
Conscious competence	Praise and continuing support
Unconscious competence	Free to practice in changed world, flying and hopefully available to help others.

**Table 2:** level of intervention required at each phase of transition.

**Personal construct model of identity**

The programme consultant then suggested that we adopt a personal construct model of personal identity. Identity we were told was constructed rather like a wall.



**Diagram 4:** Representation of personal construct model of identity

Each brick represented the way in which reality in general and in this case working reality was constructed. These constructions however are liable to damage because they are not adapted to a new environment for example. The important message here was that we should not repair the damaged bricks and attempt to re-establish old values and understanding but guide colleagues to a new more suitable construction. Faced with what Alasdair Macintyre in the Task of Philosophy (2006) calls an epistemological crisis we needed apparently new values, a new paradigm a new brick.



In a Synopsis on Empowerment written by the programme coach it is suggested that this model is fundamentally empowering in that it becomes possible to learn and construct new identities in the work place.. This is 'achieved through a learning process and human beings have the power to take control of that learning process for themselves....., or to disempower themselves and hand over control of their learning experiences to powerful others (teachers, bosses, etc.)' The possibility of empowerment is essential to the coaching process at the heart of this programme.

Seen together these two models of change anticipate workers who are potentially unconsciously incompetent because unaware of the changing world that surrounds them. The interface of leadership and personal change then seemed to be to guide people through the phases of transition in order to empower them to construct a new work based identity better adapted to a changed world.

### **Organisational Culture**

In order to lead academic change at College X it was also necessary to understand the organisational culture of the College in which we were operating. All participants filled in an organisational culture questionnaire by Harrison and Stokes (1992) which identified both how they perceived the current culture of the college and how they would like it to be. There were four possible organisational cultures with distinct, associated values:

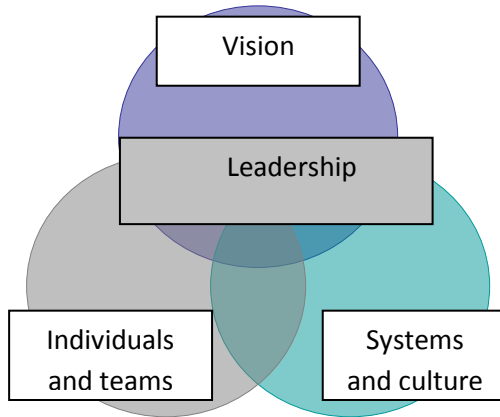
- Achievement culture based on competence (Growth, success, distinction)
- Power culture based on strength (Direction, decisiveness and determination)
- Role culture based on structure (Order, stability and control)
- Support culture based on relationships (Mutuality, service integration)

It is important to understand that there needs to be in a successful organisation a creative, dynamic tension between elements of all the cultures. Also each culture has a positive and a negative side. Successful change may involve a transformation of organisation culture as well as personal change.

The kind of organisational structure that is required in an empowering organisation and underpins successful change is according to the programme consultant one that combines the positive aspects of achievement and support culture. Role and Power cultures disempower the workforce.

### **Leadership and vision**

Leadership is not however just about facilitating personal and organisational change. It occurs at the interface between individuals, systems and cultures and vision



**Diagram 5: Leadership**

The systems include not only organisational culture but policies and nationally imposed expectations on the sector. The systems, individuals and teams are aligned in successful organisations with organisational vision or as it became known on the leadership programme 'the light'. The whole organisation requires a guiding light and each department requires its own vision or light in order to make its contribution to the overall direction of the organisation.

At the end of the induction session we were to identify the light for the organisation and apply this to our own projects and begin the process of action learning sets, concrete action, coaching and reflection, focused on personal change and organisational culture.

**Leadership and Management: environment based skills and task based skills.  
Session 2 and 3**

A contrast was then established between task-based skills or management, which are essential for the survival of an organisation and environment based skills or leadership which overcome obstacles created by the environment in which an organisation operates.

<b>Management</b>	<b>Leadership</b>
Key skills needed to do the job well, requiring performance management	Environmental skills, achieving results in spite of systems, policies, individuals and the environment external to the organisation, requiring leadership.
Planning and organising Delegation Management control Problem analysis Judgement Communication Technical understanding.	Initiative Creativity Risk taking Independent thinking Persuasiveness Tenacity vision

**Table 3:** Task based management and environmentally focused leadership

Both sets of skills are essential for successful organisations. A task based organisation, where environmental skills such as risk taking and creativity did not flourish would fail as would an organisation dominated by vision and creativity which did not ensure that essential tasks were performed.

It was also asserted that as the higher up an organisation one was the more environmentally based skills were required. In an educational organisation professionals would be teaching and support staff, the heads of department would be ‘ensuring a better start next year’ while the principal and perhaps senior staff might be the ‘creators of strategy and change’ and future vision for the next five years to come. The middle managers on the leadership programme were in fact theoretically preparing themselves for this strategic role.

It was also asserted that leaders had an umbrella responsibility in the sense that they were protecting the layer below them from their own strategic concerns so that subordinates could uninterruptedly achieve their goals. In the next session the Bennis model was introduced to reinforce the participants’ understanding of leadership

## THE BENNIS MODEL



**Diagram 6:** The Bennis model of leadership

### Power, authority and role Session 4

The principal of the college and sponsor of the programme felt that leadership also required an understanding of the operation of power and authority and the significance of role in a time of change.

#### Authority

Authority comes not only from the possession of leadership skills but also from the following combination of factors:

- Role
- A higher authority (line manager, corporation)
- Sponsorship
- Being networked (including beyond the organisation)
- Being informed about the role
- Being qualified for the role
- Having control of resources.

Leaders will also be holders of principles, which represent the aims of the sector and vision of the organisation as well as understanding norms and conventions and rules and procedures. Authority also depends on an appropriate set of skills and leadership

qualities as well as the ability to ensure tasks are carried out and appropriate decisions are made in times of crisis.

### **Role clarity**

If however there is not clarity about role then authority will be undermined. The It follows that role clarity is essential and there needs to be convergence between:

- Job description
- Actual role
- Role perceived by self
- Role perceived by others.

In other words the participants were asked to think about what they actually did, what they saw themselves as doing and what others saw them as doing, in the context of their job description.

It was also pointed out how important it was to remain in role in a successful organisation. Personal relationships and intimacies can skew ones sense of professionalism and role, particularly at a time of crisis. Authority is diminished (there is a dissonance between role and role perceived by others) if for example confidential information is shared or the change vision of an organisation one is supposed to represent is covertly resisted.

### **Power and the management of change**

The sponsor/ principal then talked about sources of organisational power which can initiate change.

1. **Coercive power.** Where coercive power operates there is a system of reward and punishment. It is doubtful that such an exclusively authority based system could work in an educational setting. Firstly the resentment generated would be counterproductive and secondly it is not clear what would constitute reward and punishment in an educational setting where promotion was rarely available and dismissal structurally impossible unless gross professional misconduct could be identified.
2. **Rational empirical power.** In this view change occurs because agents recognise rationally that it is in their self-interest. Power relations are established which make it rational to comply with change through rewarding performance. It is assumed in an educational setting for example that it is rationally in a teacher's interest to aspire to a grade 1 in a lesson observation. Organisations are however notoriously not rational and motivation for change remains extrinsic to the change process.

3. **Normative power.** Here power is said to operate through building a consensus and the attempt to create shared values. There is a process of re-education within the framework of a vision of change, which members of an organisation progressively identify with.

While in an educational setting such as College X all three sources of organisational power operate contemporaneously, it can be seen that the sponsor/principal was attempting to lead change through the establishment of a normative system.

### Delegation and Empowerment Session 5

During the next session the consultant focused on delegation and empowerment. Delegation was identified as a key task-based skill required in leadership of change. It involved:

- Authorising another to use identity or privilege with some restrictions.
- Assignment of task, responsibility or authority to a subordinate
- Work achieved through the effort of others.
- Instruction

You can't however be instructed to be empowered and according to the consultant 21<sup>st</sup> century organisations require empowered workers and this is hardly surprising given the list of characteristics he gives us associated with empowerment and disempowerment.

<b>Empowerment</b>	<b>Disempowerment</b>
Accepting responsibility	Avoiding taking responsibility
Being active	Being passive
Boldness	Timidity
Creative	Conventional
Energetic	Lethargic
Enjoys life	Gets little joy out of life
Happy	Depressed and miserable
Healthy	Many health problems
Imaginative	
Independent	
Individualistic	
Innovative	
Interesting	Dull and boring
Motivated	Unmotivated
Prepared to take risks	Reluctant to take risks
Observant	Unobservant
Satisfied with job	Frustrated in job
Sensitive to subtleties	Not sensitive to subtleties
Uses full potential	Uses fraction of potential
Uses intelligence to the full.	Does not use intelligence to full.

**Table 4:** Empowerment and delegation

It has already been made clear that the prevalent culture in an empowering organisation needs to be a combination of achievement and support. It is also the case that a traditional command and control structure disempowers, whereas a more democratic structure based on normative power empowers, as it encourages independence and initiative. Such a structure, according to the consultant ‘seeks commitment rather than obedience.’

The ‘new’ empowering organisation also promotes ‘counselling and coaching relationships’ to guide workers through transition and to create ‘a non-threatening environment in which risk taking is encouraged and failure is tolerated.’ Failure as indicated in the induction session of the leadership programme is a constructive learning experience.

The consultant concludes with a message for future leaders and therefore for the participants in the leadership programme that the manager’s main tasks are ‘*clarifying the limits* of an individual’s empowerment and *coaching and counselling* the individual in ways of performing more effectively within those limits.

### **Innovation and time Session 6**

The final content session focused on the necessity for the organisation to be innovative, so that it could respond to change in the broader environment as well as meet the needs of its students. A contrast was suggested between preserving institutions and prospecting institutions that drew together many of the themes of the programme.

<b>Preserving institution</b>	<b>Prospecting institution</b>
The immediate drives out the important	Rates of internal learning match rate of change in environment
Management of performance/task	Building innovation into ordinary Working
Coercive, authority based culture	Mobilising collective intelligence
Safe	The 4 Cs operative (consistency, conversation, capacity building and climate change)
Light independent (no vision)	Transitional and light (vision) focused.

**Table 5:** Preserving and prospecting institutions

The participants were then asked to work on the following tasks in order to identify ways of creating time for innovation:

- Listing tasks that were preservation focused
- Listing tasks that were future/innovation focused

- Working out how much time spent on these tasks and assessing their importance on a scale of 1 to 5.
- Identifying preservation tasks that could be delegated to others
- Identifying how systems could be changed to create time
- Identifying the top priority for their particular role.

### **Completion of the programme and certification**

The sponsor, the consultant and I had been concerned during the programme to work out what would be considered passing or completing the programme. Ironically in an educational organisation the idea that busy people should write a short essay was totally unacceptable. It had indeed been a condition for some of the participants that no such demand would be made. In the end it was decided that there were two conditions for completion.

- As part of the reflective process the participants were to contribute to the design of the second leadership programme by identifying possible improvements to the process.
- The participants were also to create power points summarising their experience of the leadership programme, which they would present at the induction of the second cohort. It was agreed that the middle managers and the internal coaches would do a joint presentation and that I would also give an overview.

Each candidate then received a certificate with a logo from College X and the i.coach academy, signed by the principal and the consultant.

Participants in the leadership programme were also able to gain higher education qualifications through the institute for work-based learning, based at a local university. Both internal coaches embarked on professional MAs and the programme is of course the focus of this doctorate.

### **Conclusion**

The programme had been a stimulating experience for all participants in which they had bonded in a way that only participants in a secret society can. There was also a sense that we represented a movement for change which transcended sectional departmental and role based interests. Each of our projects had been achieved. In the case of the middle managers, it may be suggested that the projects would have been achieved without any programme and this at least partly will be the focus of the next chapter that evaluates the impact and success of the programme.



## **CHAPTER 4 REFLECTIONS ON THE FIRST LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME**

### **Introduction**

Reflection by participants was meant to constitute a source of data. My understanding of the challenges of reflection has however significantly increased in sensitivity since the leadership programme. Reflection is a key tool in continuing professional development because according to Moon (A handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning Theory and Practice: 2004: 86) it creates 'intellectual space' and 'encourages meta-cognition' or an understanding of learning processes and strengths and weaknesses. However the idea that reflection is an essential learning tool has become such an unchallenged mantra that an analysis of how it should be done is rarely undertaken, guidance for participants is rarely given, and its effectiveness assumed rather than demonstrated.

The process of reflection in the Leadership Programme proved in fact to be generally more problematic than had initially been anticipated. Moon (A handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning Theory and Practice: 2004: 89) maintains the belief that everybody is capable of reflection but does not 'assume that 'everyone uses reflection effectively to improve performance.' She cites the work of Ferry and Ross-Gordon (1998) and McAlpine and Weston (2002) to suggest that 'professionals vary in the effectiveness with which they use reflection and that this is not just a function of their level of experience.'

In addition to the inevitable varying levels of effectiveness with which the participants used reflection there were further obstacles to reflection on the Leadership Programme. Fenwick quoted earlier suggested that 'constructivist' views on reflection ignored the role of power. Teachers no less than students are potentially 'fated to be prisoners of structures of domination' and it is possible to see the participants in the leadership programme as being caught in a web or 'knowledge –power field' created by the values of the institution, Ofsted and the government, which would limit the freedom to reflect. There is for inner-London teachers, however, the possibility of 'creative disorder, from which advantage can be derived.'

The sponsor and consultant were nevertheless invested with genuine power based on their role and understanding respectively. On a simple level, even though I was to be the only person who was to read their reflections, the participants may have hesitated to engage in critical reflection which would disagree with the perceived values of the sponsor, the principal or challenge the leadership theory presented to us by the expert, the consultant.

It is also acknowledged that there is a particular challenge in reflecting on formal theory as the traditional gap between theory and practice emerges. There was an expectation that participants should critically evaluate their personal, subjective experience of the project using the formal theory taught by the consultant. The participants in the programme certainly found this difficult and tended to reflect initially on the success of their project or role and not place it within the framework of the formal theory described in the previous chapter. An emergency explanatory session had to be called and a reflection template designed which encouraged the reflective integration of practice and theory.

There may be a further reason why the participants found integration of theory and practice difficult. Aristotle makes it clear (Nicomachean Ethics: 1179 b6) that theoretical input alone does not necessarily have an impact on practice, that ethical theory alone cannot make people ethical.

‘Or is the correct view that (as we have been saying) in the case of conduct the end consists not in gaining theoretical knowledge of the several points at issue but rather in putting our knowledge into practice. In that case it is not enough to know about goodness; we must endeavour to possess and use it, or adopt any other means to become good ourselves. Now if discourses were enough in themselves to make people moral to quote Theognis ‘many and fat would be the fees they earned’

Aristotle insists that theory is only effective when it corresponds to behaviour already taking place. In other words the theoretical content of the Leadership Programme would be ineffective if in the behaviour and practice of participants there wasn't already some echo of the ideas represented by that theoretical content. It may have been possible that the participants on this programme did not already behave in ways that made them receptive to the theory presented by the sponsor. The consultant on the programme certainly felt that this was a possibility and offered it as an explanation for the fact that participants did not respond warmly to the external coach. Her role was to coach them in their participation in the action learning cycle and on their active experimentation with leadership theory. If, as he suggested, the participants had been insufficiently in possession of the theory as practice prior to beginning the programme, the theory would not have been put into practice within the context of the individual change projects and the coaching process would have had no focus. Coaching by the internal coaches on the other hand was viewed extremely positively because its focus was the project and shared obstacles in the work place. These internal coaches also didn't initially integrate the theory with their coaching practice.

The final obstacle to written reflection was that there was an understandable lack of desire to participate in any written exercise that might take time from busy, professional lives. The programme was indeed to be undermined by lack of available time of its participants. Action Learning sets, for example, were seen as extremely useful but it proved difficult to find a time when participants were free together. This is an irony given the focus on time creation for innovation in session 6 of the leadership programme. Participation in the programme was undermined by a failure to achieve one of the ideals of the programme.

The fact that the induction took place at the university gave it however to start with a special feel that was never recreated because all other sessions took place at the college. We felt like a group of selected individuals and this feeling was reinforced by the fact that we were being obliged to think about the organisation and ourselves in seemingly unfamiliar ways. None of us had conceptualised issues around organisational culture, leadership and management before, although we had all identified relevant problems with the organisation and had all analysed the strengths and failings of senior and middle managers. We were also unfamiliar with constructivist Psychology and theories of personal change, although we had a sense that the leadership programme itself was to be our own particular transition curve. In fact the induction session introduced us immediately to one of the key benefits of the programme. It enabled us to name what we had sensed in our attempts to understand leadership, organisations and change. To refer to Aristotle's views on the link between practice and theory it gave us theoretical insight into at least some things that we already carried out in our practice.

This chapter is then based on the written reflection of all participants in the programme, when it was available, and on my attempt to make sense of their reflections based on the extent to which they confirmed or challenged the theoretical assumptions underpinning the programme. It needs to be understood against the problematic background just identified and is a product of the increased theoretical sensitivity that the writing of this project has generated.

## **Reflection on methodologies for change**

### **1. The Kolb Cycle**

It was surprisingly difficult to get participants to apply the Kolb cycle to their projects, given the ubiquity of action learning and the Kolb cycle in education in general and continuing professional development in particular. The problem, which has already been identified, was primarily that participants did not obviously integrate theory with their practice and therefore did not go through the active experimentation phase of the cycle. There was a degree of frustration with this non-theoretical approach and it was felt initially that perhaps the participants were insufficiently theoretical. The reality is more likely to relate to the Aristotelian theme that practice or active experimentation cannot occur on the basis of theoretical discourse alone.

After the 'emergency' session, focusing on how the Kolb cycle worked and the design of the reflective template, participants certainly understood more clearly the need for active experimentation focused on the theoretical input. The participant aiming to increase focus on teaching/learning in his/her department identified the importance of encouraging 'active experimentation' with teaching and learning theory and one of the internal coaches identified the importance of active experimentation to action learning and coaching.

‘The value of coaching is seriously diminished unless the coachee has done something. The reflections should be around how the theoretical input has allowed individuals to experiment and then DO something’ (D)

Although there was increased integration of theory and practice after the ‘emergency’ session, I now feel that the application of the Kolb cycle to an educational setting such as a leadership programme may be more effective if the starting point is the actual practice of participants, which would then be explained or refined by theoretical input focused on leadership and change. It is certainly the case that it is possible to start with practice rather than theory on the Kolb cycle. The Standard Unit model of Kolb (LSDA 2005) begins with concrete experience which leads to reflection and with the help of theory leads to the formation of concepts and generalisations, which are then tested in new situations, which in the case of the leadership programme would mean in the context of the participants’ change projects.

The other lesson from the Kolb cycle is that it is a potentially ineffective tool if there is not ownership of the change project on which it focuses. The only participant to drop out of the programme and to provide no reflective input was the participant who could not identify a project on which he/she wished to work. A project, which met his/her leadership needs, was identified for her but she/he was never sufficiently motivated by it to engage with the programme.

## **2. Coaching**

Problems associated with the Kolb cycle and the lack of active experimentation also adversely affected the participants’ experience of coaching. The role of the external coach was to engage with the reflections on their experience of the programme of participants. If they were not doing enough or applying the theoretical content to their change project there would be insufficient material on which to reflect and insufficient focus for dialogue with him/her. This might be one reason why participants found this experience largely unsatisfactory.

On the other hand the input of internal coaches was warmly welcomed. Although they did get participants to reflect on leadership and change theory, they could also apply the coaching techniques that they were developing to the immediate problems that middle managers were confronting at the College. There was clear evidence of developing expertise in the coaching process in the reflections of one of the internal coaches on his/her discussions with the external coach.

.’Explored questions which generate observational thinking. Not ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions –away from the analytical. Reflecting back (word for word), paraphrasing (‘I think what I am hearing is’), clarifying what words mean to the individual, summarising, silence’ (D)

This fits with the list of helpful coaching questions provided on Standards Unit subject coaching training (LSDA 2005). Here are some of them.

- ‘What else? Asked at the end of most answers evokes more- as does silence
- ‘If you knew the answer, what would it be?’ helps the person beyond blockage
- ‘What would the consequences of that be for you and others?’
- ‘What criteria are you using?’
- ‘What is the hardest/most challenging part of this for you?’
- ‘What advice would you give to a colleague in your situation?’
- ‘Imagine you are having a conversation with the wisest person you know, what would he or she tell you?’

Undergoing an increasingly trained dialogue in this way about aspirations and obstacles to change was invaluable. One participant described the practical benefits of the coaching process.

‘Cut preparation at weekends....felt uneasy at times in case I wasn’t well enough prepared.....managed to concentrate on essentials rather than everything at once. Felt more positive about the week ahead because I had had more of a break. Time out to reflect rather than feeling totally pressurised.....*First things First* helped me to reflect and realise that nobody can work at full stretch all week and still be effective’

There is no doubt that the development of internal coaching expertise would be helpful to any institution. The vice principal at a large inner-London FE college attributes the transition of the college from unsatisfactory to good in Ofsted inspections in a relatively short period of time, to the development of coaching expertise at all levels of the organisation. She used the CEL programme, ‘Leaders as Coaches’ which she described as the ‘best training and development experience she had had in 22 years in education’. Coaching ‘changed the language of dialogue about issues in the organisation’ and people ‘are expected not only to present problems but also to present solutions’.

### **3. Action learning Sets**

Action learning sets conducted by the internal coaches represented a kind of group coaching for participants as well as creating a safe space for active experimentation or interaction between input and project. These were again seen as very useful and one of the internal coaches recorded in detail in his/her reflection an example of an action learning set that occurred during the leadership programme. The following questions were asked of the participant by others, supposedly focused on the promotion of the 4Cs.

1. Does your project involve all staff?
2. Do the 4Cs identify the light for you?
3. Who can support you in the process?
4. How optimistic are you about success in your project?
5. What issues will remain if you are successful in your project and how will these be resolved?

6. What would success look like and how will you measure it?
7. How will you ensure that you don't do it all yourself?
8. How are you going to get constructive conversation going and maintain it?

The participant who was asked these questions then chose questions 6, 7 and 8 as the ones which would help her/him the most. She/he took these questions to the next departmental meeting and reported back positively to the coach.

'Reported positive responses in successful distribution of responsibilities within team. Individual expressed gratification and surprise at progress.'(B)

All participants reported favourably on their experience of action learning sets and they are indeed useful tools to help colleagues develop and to promote change. It has to be noted though that although there was focus on the 4Cs and successful use of an approach and methodology that would not have been used in the college had there not been a leadership programme, there was again little reference to leadership and change theory in this particular example. It is also the case that action learning sets are time consuming and it proved difficult during the programme to identify time slots when individuals were available to participate.

### **Reflection on the Induction session**

The participants responded initially to the moral purpose of the programme identified by its sponsor, the Principal and to his vision of academic leadership. Immediately however there was a concern about the limitations on the programme created by the absence of senior management involvement referred to previously.

'Glad to see that there is a moral purpose and that we owe it to students to be better and that there is a difference between management and leadership. However is there enough reflection on what we should be better for? Passing exams or developing a critical/reflective approach to society? We all 'surf the dialectic' in many ways, but SMT /AMT relationship might undermine the programme' (A)

'The vision of academic leadership is an interesting area to explore: however I feel real concern about the time implications. Also uneasy about middle management role vs. That of SMT-would rather feel that all sectors of the college had a shared vision. (C)

Unsurprisingly given this early articulation of a potentially divided organisation and the focus on time, the need for promoting 'conversation and consistency' was the leadership behaviour identified as a priority by participants.

When the consultant began to prepare us for the nature of personal change, the openness required for coaching and the learning potential in failure by asking us to share a personal failure with the others, the first participant to talk responded with searing honesty, which I feel, led other participants to be more confessional than they naturally might be.

‘felt quite uncomfortable with this as I didn’t know what sort of thing (professional or private) we were expected to reveal and to what end’ (C)

In fact issues to do with personal change, the transition curve and constructivist psychology was largely ignored in the group’s reflections, although one participant wondered if his/her team were becoming ‘consciously incompetent’. This may have negative consequences as ‘In Succession Planning for Colleges: The Transition into Leadership Positions in Further Education Colleges in England (CEL Practitioner Research Projects 2006-7) John Evans of City College, Brighton and Hove concludes that ‘college development programme should focus less on ‘corrective expertise’ programme and instead focus on the softer skills of personal change management at all levels to avoid burnout and disaffection.’ It may just be that the group instinctively knew how to support others but didn’t find the division of personal change and support into artificial stages useful.

The group were happier reflecting on issues such as organisational culture, leadership and vision and the light or direction of the organisation. The outcomes of the organisational culture questionnaire were particularly revealing and unsettling for the sponsor and me.

‘Filling this (questionnaire) in was useful because it made me aware that there is no shared organisational culture and that one’s role, location and who one’s line manager is would dramatically inform ones view. I was not surprised that support was deemed lacking and that the principal would see this as a problem.(A)

As head of the Professional Development Unit, responsible for supporting the professional development of teaching colleagues, it felt alarming that College X was seen by middle management participants as having an insufficiently supportive culture. The organisation was on the contrary seen as being, hierarchical, authoritarian and meritocratic.

The revealing nature of the responses to the questionnaire gave focus to the subsequent reflection on the theoretical claim that leadership involved the alignment of organisational vision and culture, individuals and systems. While there was some reflection on the need for aligned systems, particularly management information systems, all those who submitted written reflection agreed that aligning the values of the staff with the ‘light’ of the college was essential

‘How do we get staff on board? The idea of becoming an excellent sixth form college could be viewed very cynically. I find it hard as yet to see further. Nourishing staff is an important part of what we need to do and I’d like to explore ways forward’ (B)

Why would ‘becoming an excellent sixth form college be viewed cynically’? This is evidence of a widely held view that inner-London students with poor GCSE grades and the difficulties associated with inner city living are incapable of being part of an excellent sixth form college. The deficit culture that was implied here ran counter to the values of

the academic strategy, the PDU and the leadership programme itself and showed how necessary it was to identify a shared vision for the college. For various reasons the participants of the leadership programme felt it necessary to hold a special meeting with its sponsor to decide what that light should be. It was decided that there were two key aspects of the college's vision.

1. To become an excellent sixth form college, responding to the needs of inner-London students
2. To develop a genuinely supportive culture for all staff and students.

The degree to which the 'light' was taken seriously was indicated by the following reflection:

'I need to do more work as far as the light is concerned. If it's not relevant to them teachers won't take it on board. I need to reflect on how I intend to achieve this'.(C)

The leadership programme induction was viewed very positively by all participants as we felt that we were being provided with tools that would help us better understand the work place and make us more effective leaders. The reservations that were expressed were to do with the non-representative nature of the group, the fact that SMT were not involved and the absence of time to pursue coaching, action learning sets and reflection.

### **Reflection on Leadership and Management**

The second major content session with its focus on the difference between management and leadership and task based and environmentally created skills and competencies produced some very focused reflection. Again the response was positive because this session enabled some participants to name what they were already doing, particularly in the context of the distinction between leadership and management, between environment and task based skills. Again there was negative reflection about the role of senior managers

'Useful to put a name to the various things we do. Teaching should be a mixture of these (task based and environment based skills) as should good leadership. Difficult for those in middle management to aspire too much to the areas of risk-taking and independence when initiatives are blocked from above'(C)

The same participant also felt that the middle management role of head of department had traditionally been task based and that the transition to leadership was not easy.

'In an educational environment subject expertise and experience are key. However, have middle managers traditionally concentrated on task-based aspects because that was the nature of the job? Moving to a more active leadership role isn't necessarily easy'

An internal coach felt that the transition from task based management to environment based leadership was at the heart of the leadership programme and that 'the biggest



challenge was to assist individuals/middle managers in moving away from ‘task’ to leadership.’(D)

The concept of umbrella leadership also produced recognition and further identification of problematic relationship with senior management. The dual nature of middle management seems to both at the heart of the problems that head of departments face and what makes leadership development so necessary for middle managers.

‘Directly applicable to middle management situation. We field issues coming down from senior management and try to deflect many of them from the team so that they can perform, but often feel there is no umbrella for us. There is no often no supports for us and tasks seem to be imposed without thinking of the impact on our day to day experience, which includes maintaining a high level of classroom teaching...working across two cultures is also quite difficult as far as relationships are concerned; one is expected to be part of a team and still take a judgemental/disciplinary role’(C)

John Evans (CEL practitioner Research Projects 2006-7) identifies the following concerns for those making the transition to management or leadership.

- Losing contact with students
- Changing the friendly relationship they had with colleagues
- Lack of any greater reward than they had already
- The complexities of creating respect and authority in a new role
- Becoming opaque and closed in their relationships
- Working longer hours and impact on home life
- Not wishing to be caught in the middle.

Although it produced lively discussion about what it meant in the context of College X the Bennis material produced significantly less reflection. This could be because it focused exclusively on leadership and did not correspond to the task- based nature of middle management roles at the time or to the transition from one stage to the other. One participant, however, did use this material to identify which leadership skills he/she should develop in the future.

The focus on leadership and management was again very useful and maintained the emphasis first understood during induction that the chief benefit of this programme would be an increased ability to analyse individuals and organisations and to provide a vocabulary for doing so. It allowed and continues to allow participants to understand their own talents and failings and those of colleagues. This session also helped use to understand the need for equilibrium between management and leadership skills in an organisation. Leadership with no management would be ineffective because the practical tools for delivering organisational vision would be absent and management with no leadership would create an organisation that satisfied the demands made on it but did not improve or innovate.

## **Role and Authority, Empowerment and Delegation**

These two sessions produced less reflection although the idea that had impressed some from the induction session that failure was an important part of learning was echoed in the description of a genuinely empowered organisation in which risk taking and not fearing failure had to be encouraged. One participant did reflect that reading 'the synopsis of empowerment confirmed the importance of involving others'. Another participant responded comprehensively to the focus on role.

'Where does legitimate influence related to the role come from? Job title, from reference to a higher authority, sponsorship, connection to the institutional hierarchy, from being informed, qualifications, training, being a holder of principles, being a controller of resources? All of these are formal.....there are tensions between 'friendship' the job description the role perceived by others and the actual reality. The challenge is to get convergence between these-to achieve role clarity. Role ambiguity causes stress. This becomes skewed by 'the personal'-very College X'(D)

The reasons for this reduction of reflection compared to the previous sessions are not immediately obvious and are almost certainly varied. Firstly and quite simply these sessions took place at the busiest time of the year. Not only did participants not have time to reflect they had little time to meet for action learning sets or coaching which were designed to stimulate reflection.

Secondly these theories, although from my point of view theoretically useful, neither obviously translated into direct action nor responded to existing middle manager practice in the organisation in the way that the distinction between leadership and management had done. Staff did not generally distinguish between delegation and empowerment nor particularly did they think about whether change occurred through coercive, rational empirical or normative models. This may have been a case of excessive complexity for participants.

It should be clear however that the input in these two sessions provided us with more, complementary tools to analyse the behaviour of individuals, organisational change and management strategy. The normative model of managing change, for example, corresponded to the strategy employed by the principal and explains why he was so distressed by the perception in organisational culture analysis that there was an insufficiently developed support culture in the college. Normative models of change involve the building of a consensus, which cannot be achieved in an authoritarian and meritocratic system.

## **Reflection on time and innovation**

The focus on time and innovation generated group reflection. The group who were mostly heads of department, reflected on how much time each of the tasks of their

working life took and analysed how significant they were on a scale of 0 to 5 both in terms of compliance and innovation. (0 being unimportant, 5 being essential)

Task	% time	Importance in compliance	Importance to innovation
Teaching	50	5	5
Budgeting	1	3	1
Lesson Observation	1	4	4
1to 1 staff to students	20	2	4
Interview/marketing/enrolment	5	2	4
Chasing students/parents	5	1	0
Responding to hierarchical demands for reports etc.	5	4	0
CPD	5	2	5
Meetings	5	2	5
Hierarchical interruptions	1	0	0
Timetabling.	5	5	4

**Table 6:** Group analysis of time balance between compliance and innovation

This is a somewhat bizarre list not least because the group perceived itself to be working 103% of the time but does generate some revealing observations.

- Unsurprisingly innovation occurs in an educational setting in teaching, 1 to 1 time with students, lesson observation and staff development.
- Surprisingly we also considered interviewing, marketing and enrolment crucial to innovation, when these are activities that are necessary for maintaining an organisation rather than innovation.
- Meetings were again somewhat surprisingly seen as a 2 in terms of compliance but a 5 relative to innovation. This indubitably reflects the fact that many meetings are unproductive but obligatory and the sense that focused, necessary meetings could be innovative.

The group then identified what would make an innovative organisation, and produced the following list: An innovative organisation would:

- Involve more staff in a shared framework
- Empower staff to prepare for succession
- Engage in research and reflection about what it did
- Involve the student voice
- Review and stream line systems in line with the shared framework to create time.
- Pursue the 4Cs
- Develop organisational awareness and understanding.
- Ask the question; ‘how well is it being done’?
- Model leadership behaviour at all levels

- Be encouraging and not negative
- Don't tell people how, ask them how
- Be active not reactive
- Develop professionalism leading to autonomy and confidence
- Focus on making things better by sharing good practice
- Replace problem stating mentality with problem solving mentality
- Not pursuing projects of which no one else is aware. Internal marketing of innovation important

Implicit in this group blue print for an innovative organisation is the need to save time, which was another focus of group reflection. Empowerment of staff and all levels of the organisation would save time for managers and leaders in the hierarchy by developing autonomy and professional confidence. There was as indicated also a focus on systems. It was felt that information technology was needed to streamline systems such as report writing and that the number of meetings needed to be reduced significantly. The experience of the group meeting after college also made us realise that staff were willing to work outside conventional college hours if the context was sufficiently stimulating. Finally middle managers, who all worked in open plan offices with their teams, all desired a quiet space for reflection and development activities.

### **Planning for the future**

The final group reflection of the programme was on how to improve the programme for the second cohort of brave would be leaders. It was felt by the group that three kinds of changes would improve the programme. Firstly it required more clarity. Participants should have more pre programme information, the induction material should be placed in the context of the programme as a whole, and the Kolb cycle should be clearly understood from the start. Secondly it was crucial that participants had clearly defined motivation for participation and a change project that they genuinely cared about. The one participant on the first programme who had failed to complete had never really been motivated by leadership and did not have a project that she/he wished to pursue. Finally it was decided to have fewer sessions but maintain momentum by more focused inter-session activity

To respond to this group view of changes that were necessary I designed an application form for the next cohort, which contained an outline of the programme, and spaces for statements of motivation and description of the proposed change project. The clarity concerning what the next cohort was to experience was to be the responsibility of the participants of the first programme, who would be responsible for leading on the content of the induction session.

## Conclusion

In spite of its problems and failings, time constraints and the unwillingness to reflect formally of at least two participants, this leadership programme felt like a success to all of us. The change projects were successfully achieved. One middle manager successfully changed the focus of his/her department from administration to teaching and learning. I should know. I was in her department. Another middle manager successfully introduced curriculum change, while we had developed two highly valued coaches. Also I had permission for a second leadership programme.

There were perhaps more profound reasons for the experience of the programme being positive. As a group we had a shared vision of the strategic direction we would like the college to take and we had a shared vocabulary with which we could name, and analyse obstacles to change in the organisation. The experience not only allowed us to bond professionally, it also made us closer personally.

It would be wrong however to over emphasise the positive nature of the experience. The constructivist, individualist methodology of the sponsor, in which we were free to create our own professional self-identity independent of relations of power, created in us, I believe, the 'existential anxiety' that Giddens (1991 *Modernity and Self Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*) claims is characteristic of late modernity. Our pre-existing unreflective professional habits or conscious incompetence were certainly more comfortable. However, 'habit is the ballast that chains the dog to its vomit', (1969:Proust and three dialogues with Georges Duthuit) according to Beckett's understanding of Proust. It was constructive to be taken out of our comfort zone.

The Kolb cycle also proved difficult to apply in practice because active experimentation and reflection proved perhaps too often elusive. I am not sure, however, that this matters. Doyle (A reflexive critique of learner Managed Learning: Education-line data base.2003) quotes Miettinen (2005: 54-72) as suggesting that 'the four stages of the cycle are artificially separated and don't connect in any organic or necessary way'. While reflective learning and the Kolb cycle are perhaps unchallenged 'mantras' of adult learning and continuing professional development' they need just to be seen as a way of structuring the learning experience. It would have been good to have received more reflections from participants and there should have been recognition that reflection on theory is not an automatically easy process. However it doesn't matter that the four 'artificially separated stages' are rigidly adhered to. What matters is that learning takes place and learning certainly took place on the first leadership programme.

More serious perhaps is the Aristotelian problem of translating learning and theory into practice. I feel that this did occur where the programme named behaviour that participants were already tacitly familiar with and certainly the projects were successful and participants still claim they were influenced by the programme. However when I think back to the first leadership programme now I think of a somewhat unreal island of theory that floated above the real problems that College X had to confront. This was

symbolised and exemplified by the way in which the senior management team were not involved at any level in the programme and the anxiety expressed by participants about this.

The rejection of the leadership programme by the senior management team was somewhat justified because of the minimal impact of the programme on the college as a whole. The isolation of the programme and its participants meant that it had little impact on others and on the life of students in the college. The programme had failed to identify what its goals were. It had provided participants with conceptual and analytical tools to analyse the organisation but hadn't understood that successful leadership development needed to have a significant impact beyond the case study.

It is always useful to have an intelligent, widely read informant at the work place and mine told me when I described the leadership programme that it was insufficiently grounded in what middle and senior managers actually did. Retrospectively this also seems to be true and during the programme there ought to have been reference to the practical tasks of middle and senior managers at the College as well as sessions on the policy landscape for Further Education.

It would also have been helpful to analyse the specific, Janus headed role of middle managers. Anne Briggs in 'Middle Managers in FE Colleges' (2005: 32) suggests that middle managers are 'corporate agents, implementers, Staff managers, bridge builders (liaison) and leaders'. This typology is backed up by Philip Barker (2006.99) when he asked teachers what they thought middle management did. They said middle managers had:

- A go between role
- An authority role
- A management role
- A leadership role

For me the hardest thing about middle management, which is where its leadership role is really situated, is the tension between promoting departmental interest and maintaining the role of corporate agent in being responsible for cross college decision making. This was barely addressed by the programme.

It would have also been useful to identify the personal characteristics of future leaders so that the participants could have reviewed their apparent reluctance to consider promotion. These characteristics were identified by current public service leaders in Rush to the Top (2008).

- Confidence and credibility
- The ability to see the big picture, to make connections and think of the whole organisation
- Getting involved (doesn't look the other way or walk past incidents)
- Initiative and self-motivation (the sort of people you can't stop from leading)

- Intellectual curiosity and capacity (sees the common threads)
- Resilience and empathy(to survive the pace of acceleration and learn from others)

Perhaps because of issues of power and the charismatic and knowledgeable presence of the consultant the participants were insufficiently critical in their reflection of the content of the programme. The detachment of the programme from the rest of the college and from the wider, changing world of Further Education, were to have consequences for the future both of the programme and ultimately for the future of the college.

My project had nevertheless been theoretically achieved. In the language of action learning: a problem had been identified, an intervention had been designed, its impact had been evaluated by participants and a new, potentially more effective intervention had been designed.

Does theoretical achievement equate to success? Participants had formed a solid nucleus within the organisation that was focused on a shared purpose and on change. They had a new language to interpret future successes and failures in the organisation and had gained in self-confidence.

There were, however, aspects of the programme that might be deemed unsuccessful.. None of the participants became ambitious for promotion as a result of participation so that the preparation for succession element of the programme was unfulfilled. The two key facilitators of the programme, me and the middle manager coach, have been subsequently promoted. It may be that facilitation rather than participation allows for the development of leadership skills in this kind of programme. It maybe that the participants were not ambitious and that the facilitators were.

Gleeson and Knights (2007; 49-63) suggest that middle managers do not seek promotion because ‘they seek more space and autonomy to stay in touch with their subject, their students and their own pedagogic values and identities’ and because they are not willing to sacrifice ‘personal, professional and familial values’. While this is true it is in educational leadership that one can test ones values against dominant educational discourses and make a difference to lives. At the very least we would have to review how participants for the leadership programme had been selected.

To summarise the successes and failures of the first programme using the theoretical propositions underpinning this case study, mentioned in chapter 2, the programme did seem to improve the professional practice of individuals and the ingredients of the programme seemed useful. Collaborative learning was also a positive experience as was the development of internal coaching expertise. The Kolb cycle was on the other hand less successful as were the integration of theory and practice and the generation of helpful reflective data. More seriously, the programme had little impact on staff and students and practice in the rest of the college. This was because of the size of the group, the non-involvement of senior managers and because, in the words of the participants themselves, no techniques were developed to ‘market innovation’ and the programme.

## **CHAPTER 5 PROBLEMS FOR THE LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME CYCLE**

### **Introduction**

As the first leadership programme had been deemed successful by the principal/sponsor, it was decided to invest in a second leadership programme. This second programme, however, was undermined by significant departures and a relatively unsuccessful Ofsted inspection in November 2005.

The departure of the principal/sponsor would have serious consequences not just for the leadership programme but also for the values of the PDU and the College's academic strategy. The departure of the internal coaches (both promoted and potentially successful alumni of the first programme) would mean that it was impossible, at least from half way through the programme to pursue action learning sets and provide participants with a focus for the active experimentation phase of the Kolb cycle. It became clear that continuity of involvement of personnel or at least making sure that the values underpinning any leadership programme were shared by the whole organisation was necessary for success.

Any staff development programme needs to ultimately have an impact on the whole college. The outcomes of the November 2005 inspection were potentially even more damaging to the success of the project. Having been considered good in an Ofsted inspection in 2002, we were now found only to be satisfactory. The lessons observed were not very impressive and there was insufficient confidence in our capacity to improve. We were now considered to be a coasting college, with the increased scrutiny that that entailed. The academic strategy and the leadership programme had been essential to our improvement strategy and might be now seen as failures by any incoming potential sponsor or principal.

### **DEPARTURES**

#### **Departure of the sponsor**

The first day of the second leadership programme was ironically the last day of the principal/ programme sponsor's time at the College. The participants of the first programme made their presentations to the new programme participants, the principal/sponsor commented favourably on the leadership and change sophistication of the power points he witnessed and then left the College for the last time.

In reality however he had left the programme in the hands of a middle manager (me) and the consultant. Theoretically this should have been unproblematic. After all the leadership programme had indicated that leadership skills were environmentally focused and achieved results in spite of systems, policies, individuals and the environment



external to the organisation. I needed to keep the programme going in spite of these new circumstances.

Particular leadership skills were perhaps required in this instance because not only would leadership programme 2 be without a sponsor but the principal/sponsor had also excluded whole areas of the College's management team from it and also from the academic strategy that underpinned it. To influential organisational players it all looked rather like a secret society, operating within the College. According to 'From Little Acorns: towards a strategy for spreading good practice within colleges (Cox and Smith 2004: pg 34) such organisational division would not successfully promote change:

'a culture that fosters and enables the sharing of practice for the common purpose has to be promoted and the climate in which colleges operate needs to promote an openness that challenges any notions of tribes or cliques'

It is further stated that the success of 'developmental projects' requires 'levers' or a 'counter-activity that takes forward any improvement to other/all areas'. There were no such leavers in the College at that time or in the language of the leadership programme the vision, the systems and individuals and teams were not aligned to guarantee the success of the leadership programme, the PDU or the academic strategy. They had not been internally marketed

It is however a natural consequence of organisational complexity and a changing environment that things should be divided and not aligned and the principal/sponsor was very aware of what he was doing. In the first leadership programme in the session on role, authority and power, he made it clear that he was operating a normative rather than a rational or coercive model, in which he was aiming to 'build a consensus, create shared values and carry out a process of re-education within the framework of a vision of change, which members of an organisation could progressively identify with' (see chapter 3). The progressive identification with a vision of change implies that groups in organisations will for a period of time be at different stages of development relative to their understanding and acceptance of that vision.

In conversation with me, the principal often referred to the idea of a 'garbage can' model of change, originally developed by Cohen, March and Olsen (1972). This model is based on the anarchic and complex nature of organisations, in which problems and solutions are not rationally connected. In the garbage can model members of organisations have favoured solutions waiting for problems to solve and both problems and solutions can be discarded or retrieved. According to Peters and Pierre (multi-level governance: a view from the garbage can. Manchester Papers in Politics: EPRU series 1/2002. <http://www://lesl.man.ac.uk/government/>) participants in organisations have 'problematic preferences' and 'fluid participation' depending on their favoured solution or problem. According to the model organisations also have 'unclear technology' which means that the 'processes' through which organisations make change and improve are poorly understood by its members. This unclear situation however is 'the locus of enormous opportunity for more adventurous players' in organisations, to promote

favoured solutions to problems. At the same time others may not participate in the prevailing solution culture and may even resist it. It seems likely that, to use the language of Cox and Smith, the development of influential 'tribes and cliques' is inevitable in this model of organisations.

It is also certainly true that an organisation like College X is complex. My experience in the PDU and on the leadership programme leads me to favour views of organisational change which are based at the very least on ideas of bounded rationality. Even individuals who think they are making rational choices are only responding adequately to a complex dynamic of organisations. Optimal or maximising solutions cannot occur because of the partial nature of available information and the need to respond quickly to change. To quote Grint again (2008), there are only 'wicked problems' and 'clumsy solutions'.

The project itself was also based on a normative view of change and the operation of power. It was about consensus creation. The problem was, however, that change viewed in the intellectual way it was understood by the principal/sponsor was not understood by other key players in the organisation. Secondly such a process of change would take time. The principal/sponsor himself had always said that 7 years would be required for successful change. His departure took place after 5 years with the process on which he had embarked incomplete and it would allow people with different preferred solutions, different perceived problems and particularly with a view that change was achieved rationally and empirically, to take their opportunity. The solution problem interface which the leadership programme represented would mean that it, along with the PDU and academic strategy, risked potentially becoming even more marginal to College activity.

### **Departure of the internal coaches**

Even if the Principal had not left the leadership programme was facing its own problems. The development of internal coaching expertise had been one of the key successes of the first programme and the middle management participants had greatly appreciated the support of the internal coaches. The fact that one internal coach decided to leave to pursue freelance coaching (she had already begun training as a coach prior to the beginning of the programme) and that the other was promoted to a role in a large FE college nearer his home would suggest that the programme was successful for them too.

The consequences for the programme, however, were potentially serious. The Kolb cycle required the active experimentation phase for which the internal coaches in action learning sets were responsible. There was no way that I could take over their roles on my own, even though I had learned the techniques of coaching and organising action learning sets almost by osmosis. Without active experimentation with the ideas and concepts of the leadership programme it would be even harder to promote reflection and learning..

On the other hand this kind of problem would provide an opportunity for developing the leadership programme further in the future. If it could be demonstrated that learning still took place without the active experimentation phase of the Kolb cycle then those who felt

that the division between phases of the cycle was artificially imposed would seem to be correct and there would be other key factors underlying the success or failure of the leadership programme.

### **The Inspection**

During the Principal's time at the college it was felt we were a successful and innovative college. When Ofsted called in November 2005, after his departure, they were unimpressed and found that the quality of teaching and learning was only satisfactory for the following reasons:

- Failure for lesson planning to meet the needs of individual students
- Lack of challenge for the most able
- Insufficient support for the less able
- Too little opportunity for students to contribute other than listen and take notes
- Insufficient use of ILT to promote learning

The departure of the principal before the inspection was crucial. It is worth citing again his views about the task of the College and judgements about its effectiveness.

‘the frustrating thing is that although I am firmly convinced that tackling these kinds of issues (teaching and learning and responding to the London context) is key to the longer term, improvement and success of the College, neither the task itself nor our progress in relationship, to it weighs much when judgements are made about our effectiveness’

Only the Principal could explain how he was attempting to ‘surf the dialectic’ between the ‘task’ and the judgements being made about ‘effectiveness’ by Ofsted, particularly because the people who after his departure had to explain the college vision to the inspection team had been excluded from it. Had the Principal been still in post he may have persuaded the inspection team to understand us differently, although it is difficult to imagine anyone overcoming the damaging indictment of teaching and learning in the college just cited.

The ‘tribal’ situation of the college did not allow for success in inspection. The situation was, however, unavoidably ‘tribal’ because of the ‘normative, garbage can model of change.’ The principal had argued that seven years would be required for successful change to occur. In other words the inspection came two years too early for consistent transformation to have occurred.

The real problem was however the fact that the excellent outcome from 2002 had lead to complacency. Also Ofsted had changed the way that inspections were carried out and as an institution we had not properly understood this. The focus now was on AS level results and the College had a 76% AS pass rate compared with a national sixth form college benchmark figure of 86%. Even if performance in the classroom had been strong we could not have been other than a satisfactory college.

In the language of the leadership programme leadership and management were disassociated at the College. There was a focus on strategy and vision but inadequate task-based management. Understanding the shifting inspection framework was a management task that had been somewhat neglected. It was as if we had experienced collective 'unconscious incompetence' This would indicate that the College was potentially too inward looking and that the projects that were at the heart of the action learning process could have been focused on policy change and the outside world as well as on teaching and learning and academic change.

I had felt that the inspection outcome did not reflect too badly on my role as head of the PDU partly because of my middle management position. This was not however to be the case. On the basis of an audit of lesson plans and schemes of work I had carried out after the inspection I was invited to present an explanation for the teaching and learning outcomes at the annual corporation conference with the then vice principal of the college. After the presentation the new principal of the College sought me out to tell me I had done well because she felt it was normally so difficult 'to wash one's dirty linen in public.'

## **Conclusion**

The second leadership programme would have no sponsor and no support in the hierarchy of the College and there were soon no internal coaches to support the programme. The second programme would have to be delivered by me and the consultant and would exist even more in isolation from the rest of the College. Also the strategic rationale for the programme and the academic strategy had been undermined by the inspection outcome.

Although I felt that the programme, refined and improved by the participants of the first programme was still worth delivering, it was clear that there were several things that could be done to improve future programme. Leadership programme needed to emerge from shared and agreed values at all levels, participation must not be seen as tribal and the focus of participant projects must include engaging with the wider world and Ofsted.

## **CHAPTER 6 THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME 1 AND LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME 2**

### **Introduction**

It is intrinsic to the movement of action learning that the second leadership programme would be different from the first as it would be based on what had been learned from the first programme. It would also be different because of the crises mentioned in the previous chapter. The departure of the principal, the departure of the internal coaches, the relatively unsuccessful inspection, and the arrival of a new principal during the programme would all affect the programme.

The second programme would be different because of the numbers involved, in how one was selected for participation, in the nature of the experience due both to the size of the cohort and the absence of key players from the first programme and in what kind of final activity would merit certification.

That the programme was completed at all in the face of obstacles and that participants mostly considered it a professionally valuable experience is, in my view, evidence that internally run leadership programme have value.

### **Numbers involved**

The first programme had been experimental and therefore had involved a small number of pioneer participants. It had been considered successful and the new programme was to be made available to more people. It was also felt that so called support staff should participate in it as they were another key to the successful transformation of the College and could benefit any way from staff development on leadership and management. Thirteen intrepid colleagues began the programme including the manager of the learning resource centre, the manager of the guidance unit and the college student advisor. This increase in numbers could have led to increased impact on the rest of the college.

### **The selection process**

Whereas early adaptors had been approached and invited to participate in the first programme, Heads of Department were invited to recommend participants and the principal and I went round the college trying to persuade particular colleagues to participate. In other words there still wasn't an open and transparent application process.

The participants from the first programme had felt that the process of committing to the programme was the key change that was needed for successful completion. An application form had been consequently designed containing the following elements based on their recommendations:

- An outline of the content of the course so that it was less like a magical mystery tour. Participants therefore knew what to expect, although it was clearly stated that content was negotiable. What wasn't negotiable was that there would be action learning sets and reflective writing in the template which had been designed for the first programme.
- A statement explaining what benefit participants expected to gain from the programme. It had been felt on the first programme that not all participants had been fully motivated.
- A statement explaining how the College might benefit from the participant's involvement in the programme
- A request that participants would at the beginning of the programme identify an area of their work to which they would apply the understanding they developed during the programme. This had two purposes. It would identify the project on which the participant would focus so that no one had to have a project suggested by someone else half way through the programme. Ownership of the project had been deemed important for meaningful engagement by the participants on the first programme. Also it highlighted the need to link the project to the theoretical content of the programme. We went as far as giving a list of possible projects which were: changing teaching and learning, introducing curriculum change, empowering colleagues to take initiative, developing a coaching model in department or team.

Undeniably an improvement on the selection process in the first programme it should still be pointed out that it failed to keep everybody on the programme. 5 people left for reasons which were both predictable and unexpected based on the experience of the first programme. The reasons they left were in no particular order:

- A failure to identify a project (in spite of the application form)
- The view that leadership theory was fundamentally unempirical and we seemed to be being exposed to the views of one person with little concrete evidence for his claims.
- A general feeling of anger and disassociation with the organisation which the programme was exacerbating
- Departure for another organisation
- A belated understanding that personal focus was subject/curriculum and not leadership/management

Nevertheless whereas two heads of department completed the first programme, eight colleagues attended all the content sessions on the second leadership programme.

## **Content**

The structure of the programme had to change to accommodate increased numbers and departure of the principal, although it would still be based upon the concepts of action learning, the Kolb cycle and reflection.

Firstly it was clearly impossible to organise individual coaching for all thirteen participants both by the internal coaches and the i-coach academy external coach. It was therefore decided that the safe experimentation phase and the promotion of reflection should emerge from regular action learning sets. This was explained as part of the induction which this time had two phases.

- Phase 1: presentation from last year's participants and explanation of action learning, the Kolb cycle
- Phase 2: establishing action learning sets, doing the organisational questionnaire and understanding the four C's and institutional change

The learning that had taken place in the first programme was demonstrated by the presentation from the internal coaches when they explained the nature of action learning sets to the new cohort. They claimed that the opportunities from action learning sets were:

- Time and space for your own reflection
- Insights from others/with others
- Different perspectives from others
- Others' experiences
- Others' knowledge
- Being questioned by others
- Sharing confusion with others
- Sharing success with others
- Gaining confidence

They also shared with the new cohort the kind of questions that might be the focus of action learning sets:

- How would you describe your team ethos now and how ideally will this have developed in 12 months' time?
- Is anxiety about obstacles helpful in gaining momentum towards a successful outcome?
- What needs to happen now for the team to move in the right direction?
- Do you feel it is all your responsibility?
- Having successfully achieved your goals, what have you and your team done to get there?

The application of the Kolb cycle was also more sophisticated this time in that the action learning sets were not randomly established. Following Kolb's recommendation and learning style inventory, complimentary types of learner were placed together in groups. He had identified four types of learner based on the stages of the cycle.

- Diverging learners who feel and watch ( combining a taste for concrete experience/reflective observation)
- Assimilating learners who think and watch (combining abstract conceptualisation with reflective observation)
- Converging learners who think and do (combining abstract conceptualisation with active experimentation)
- Accommodating learners who feel and do (combining active experimentation with concrete experience)

In addition to the induction there were just five content or theory sessions:

1. Managing versus leading
2. The Bennis model of leadership
3. Delegation and empowerment
4. Compliance/innovation
5. Time creation.

The absence of the principal meant there could be no session on Power, Role or Authority and my increased freedom as leader of the programme meant that I could also incorporate material of my own inspired by Boyatzis from 'Unleashing the Power of Self –Directed Learning (.2002) Boyatzis suggests 5 stages of discovery in self-directed learning:

1. My ideal self. Who do I want to be?
2. My real self. Who am I? My strengths. Where my ideal and real self are similar. My gaps. Where my ideal and real self are different
3. My learning agenda. Building on my strengths while reducing the gaps
4. New behaviour, thoughts and feelings through experimentation. Creating new neural pathways through mastery practice
5. Trusting relationships that help support, and encourage each step in the process

Although once again this was a change consultant seemingly ignoring relations of power and control, I felt an attempt to integrate Boyatzis's self-directed learning with the theoretical content of the leadership programme would be a useful way to get participants to continue to use the leadership programme after they had finished



Boyatzis	The leadership programme
<p>My ideal self</p> <p>My real self: strengths and weaknesses: Strengths=where my ideal and real self are similar Weaknesses= where my ideal and real self are different</p> <p>Learning agenda-building on my strengths while reducing the gaps: developing an agenda based on a desired future: ‘a learning orientation will replace a performance orientation for those organisations that thrive in the coming decades’</p>	<p>Personal change</p>
<p>Discovery: new behaviour through experimentation and practice</p>	<p>Safe place to practice and experiment =ALS, coaching before concrete experience (the Kolb cycle)</p>
<p>‘A major threat to effective goal setting (a learning agenda) is that people are already busy and cannot add anything else to their lives so they have to determine what they can say no to and to stop some current activities in their lives</p>	<p>The Leadership programme focus on innovation and strategies for making time</p>
<p>Another obstacle is committing to a plan that requires a learning style that is not your preference</p>	<p>Learning style questionnaire</p>
<p>The creation of relationships or a ‘reference group’ in which we interpret our progress on desired change give support and feedback. ‘Existing reference groups (departments, work friends) might have an investment in you staying the same, ‘Are you developing relationships as part of the learning process?’</p>	<p>Membership of the leadership programme the action learning set</p> <p>Empowerment and delegation</p> <p>The model of a successful organisation given to us by the consultant, in which we should all have a line manager and a mentor/coach.</p>

**Table 7:** application of Boyatzis to the leadership programme

I also asked participants to ask if self-directed learning was possible in an organisation if the ‘light’ for the organisation was not clear and was not aligned with systems and structures.

## **Completion of the programme and certification**

It became clear during the programme that because of a change in priority in the leadership of the college and restructuring of roles, that there was unlikely to be a third leadership programme. This position was reinforced by the cost of consultancy for the programme which was £15,000 pounds per year. This meant that completion and certification could not be achieved by means of presentation at the induction of a third cohort. Once the abandoning of the programme was certain by the start of the new academic year 2006/7 I decided in consultation with the i-coach academy to award certificates to anyone who would be interviewed by me about their experience on the programme. Seven of the remaining eight participants agreed to an interview based around the following guiding questions:

- Which theoretical input from the consultant was useful and why?
- Were action learning sets useful and why?
- How would you improve a future programme?
- Was your original project successful?
- Is there any influence from the programme on your current work?
- Should the college be running an internal leadership programme and why?

I also asked all participants if they felt we needed to continue to use a consultant to run future leadership programme. At that stage I felt that I could convince the new leadership of the need for a programme which I was reasonably confident I could run, based on the understanding I had developed during the two programme. In this way the action learning could continue with minimal cost for the college.

## **Conclusion**

There was less bonding than amongst the participants of the first programme but this was hardly surprising. There were more of us and rather than being the expression of the values of the principal the programme was now out of tune with the prevailing organisational focus. It felt to me at times that we were rather like a disparate group of Japanese soldiers fighting on in the jungle while world war two had finished in the world outside. Unlike the Japanese soldiers, however, we knew that the war was over.

The problems, the reactions of participants from application through to completion combined with what had been learnt from the first programme nevertheless gave much material for reflection. It was clear what an improved third leadership programme would look like if it were allowed to run.

## **CHAPTER 7 REFLECTION ON THE SECOND LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME 2005-2006**

### **Introduction**

The second leadership programme had then limped through to completion in the most difficult of circumstances. The participants had the same resistance to reflection on its content as the previous cohort and indubitably for the same reasons. The ability to reflect was again variable as was the willingness to reflect depending on the participants' subjectively perceived relationship to time and sense of their own business. Some participants again offered no reflection during the whole process

The problem of reflection was certainly exacerbated by the departures and transformations that undermined the programme generally. Without the principal as sponsor it was easier to continue the programme without fully committing to its demands. The relationship with power was different also as the programme was the last vestige of a disappearing regime and set of values and no longer reflected the prevailing priorities of the organisation. Finally and perhaps even more significantly the departure of the internal coaches meant that the action learning sets, designed to promote reflection, didn't really happen. Participants experienced one action learning set.

There was therefore, in spite of the increased numbers, less reflection on the content of the programme than there had been in the first programme. This doesn't mean that there was no data to answer the research question being posed. The questions on the newly generated application form indicated both a need for leadership programme and the nature of the concerns that staff had concerning management, their own positions and their ambitions in the context of inner-London further education. There was interesting reflection from some on the integration of the theory/content with their projects. The interview at the end of the programme also provided valuable material concerning the need for such programme and how the content and structure may have altered had the cycle of action learning continued and a third programme been undertaken. This chapter will therefore be divided into sections on selection, theory/content and end of programme interview.

It is in the nature of action learning that the programme would have evolved further. The positive response of those interviewed in spite of 'the crises' indicates a real need for such programme, effectively executed.

### **The selection process**

It had been one of the major concerns of the participants in the first programme that there would be a clear selection process, which would identify commitment and make sure that

the change project which would be the focus of reflection would be 'owned' by participants.

The process was however still insufficiently transparent. Most participants were approached 'in the corridors of power' and invited to apply. The application form also suggested to them what benefit they could expect to gain from the programme by listing the theoretical content. Also in the name of clarity possible projects were identified on the form such as changing teaching and learning, which meant that participants were being steered in project choice in directions that they might not naturally have taken or were perhaps insufficiently reflective about their project.

While it is true that it was easier to leave the programme because of the departure of the Principal, a more rigorous selection process might have prevented the number of departures that did take place. The lessons of the first programme should have clearly indicated the reasons for most of the departures from the programme. During the first programme one participant had left because she never had a clear project to which she/he could apply the theoretical content of the programme. Two participants left the second programme for exactly the same reason. Also it had been clear that the 'constructivist, individualist methodology' of the programme had created in the participants of the first programme the 'existential anxiety' Giddens considered characteristic of late modernity (see chapter 5). It was then not surprising that someone who felt angry and disassociated from the organisation should find those feelings exacerbated. All three perhaps should not have participated in the programme.

It was harder to predict that one participant would leave because of the unempirical nature of leadership theories. I nevertheless have some sympathy with this position. I have been overwhelmed by the range of leadership theories I have confronted during this project and been bewildered by the way in which leadership conferences often begin by asking delegates to list the characteristics of leaders they admire, as if that constituted research. At one conference I attended delegates chose Alan Sugar and Richard Branson. On the first leadership programme we chose Nelson Mandela.

In an article on 'leadership guru' Ronald Heifetz, Rakesh Khurana, professor of leadership at the Harvard Business School is quoted saying that 'there is a gap between research on leadership(which is lacking) and models (which are not)' (Emily Stokes, FT Weekend Magazine, May 16/17 2009). While this is undeniably true it shouldn't matter in action learning. The point is that the empirical testing ground of theory is not prior evidence for its claims but the interface between it and the project.

It might have also been wise to share with participants during the selection process the characteristics of middle management and the qualities of future leaders so that they could understand that participation was right for them.

In spite of the flawed nature of the new selection process it was still an improvement on the secret society nature of the first process. The benefits for themselves and for the College identified by participants generally suggest the need for a leadership programme.

## **How the participants might benefit from the leadership programme**

Some participants identified benefits that corresponded to the list they were given (Institutional change, managing versus learning, delegation and empowerment, time creation etc). It is not certain that participants would otherwise have focused on distinctions between management and leadership or on delegation and time creation

‘I feel I am sometimes just a manager and not as inspirational as I would like to be’ (AF2)

‘I would like to improve my own time management and more effectively delegate’ (AF3)

Although these respondents may have been insufficiently reflective in their responses there was also a genuinely personal element to their vision. The desire to be ‘inspirational’ was real and AF3 talked about wishing to ‘gain confidence’. Most participants moreover did identify personal goals that didn’t necessarily correspond to the list.

- Be able to get to the core of a problem
- Hope to encourage others to lead by example
- Develop the ability to sense change and respond to it
- Have professional development’ (AF1)

Other participants talked about the need for a need for a ‘a clear rationale or theoretical basis’ (AF9) for leadership and institutional change and the need for a definition of ‘the meaning of leadership for my own purposes at work’ (AF8)

Given this level of expectation concerning personal benefit it is worth noting that the programme was not going to fulfil all of them. Time management and delegation are for example management skills and the focus of the programme was leadership. It is debatable that there is a ‘clear theoretical basis’ for what works in leadership and no programme could make someone ‘inspirational’. Leadership practice or being inspirational has to already be implicit in the conduct of future leaders if Aristotle is right about ethical training and this view can be applied to leadership training. One could also argue that ‘sensing change’ is the one thing neither leadership programme considered. They were both perhaps too inwardly focused and ignored signs that the world of further education in the eyes of the government and Ofsted might be changing.

## **The benefits of participation for the college**

The consequence of the personal development the programme would offer would be improved student results and performance of colleagues and teams.

Five participants identified improved student results as the benefit for the college of participation, (AF3, AF4, AF6, AF7 and AF9) while others focused on colleagues and teams, which implicitly focuses on improved achievements

‘Getting the best out of others’ (AF1)  
‘A better function team who will contribute equally to new ideas’ (AF2)  
‘The team is good but will become outstanding when my leadership improves’ (AF5)  
‘Cross-college issues which cut across (against) departmental boundaries and which are becoming increasingly pressing require colleagues with wider and more inclusive views and understanding’ (AF8)  
‘Empowering staff to innovate.....’ (AF9)

While the benefits to the college identified were admirable it is significant that none directly refer to the academic strategy or to the specific needs of inner-London students. In other words the discourse of key staff did not reflect the strategic direction of the college and the vision of the principal responsible for the leadership programme.

### **The focus of participation or the project**

The projects identified by participants of the second leadership programme were admirable and sincere. They were however also minimally focused on the academic strategy and only indirectly attuned to the needs of inner-London FE students. Furthermore they were inwardly focused and didn’t seem to be ‘sensing change’ in the FE policy landscape. The project proposals were:

‘Changing teaching and learning’ (AF1)  
‘Maybe managing change (AF2)  
‘Give staff the tools to enable them to take more initiative ...’ (AF3)  
‘Improving student teacher interactions’ (AF4)  
‘Increasing importance of team in the college community’ (AF5)  
‘Team building, delegating, and the orderly administration of affairs in the swirl of events’ (AF6)  
‘Development of negotiating skills .....to motivate staff and keep conflict to a minimum’ (AF7)  
‘Focus on transitional issues? Development of skills in language across departments, development of holistic approaches to student experience’ (AF8)  
‘Harnessing varied staff experience... to move from supervised learning to less supervised learning’ (AF9)

I now believe that we should have been more not less interventionist concerning the nature of projects staff were allowed to pursue. Participants in leadership programme should have been made to identify practical outcomes. ‘Changing teaching and learning’ for example could be transformed into a project with a concrete outcome reflecting the academic strategy such as developing autonomy or integrating information learning technology into pedagogy.

The nature of the projects needed to be less insular. Given the strategic vision of the College there should have been projects on what it means to be located in inner-London such as integrating diversity awareness into practice and developing strategies for

involving the community. Also in the light of the November 2005 Ofsted inspection it would have been sensible to insist on projects focused on 'sensing change' and responding to developments in the wider world of the FE policy landscape. In this way, the project could have genuinely 'surfaced the dialectic' between the needs of inner-London students and the demands of Ofsted and the LSC.

Earlier I suggested that by listing a series of possible projects on the application form participants were steered towards projects unreflectively. The problem I believe is not that participants were steered towards projects but that the list was too vague and didn't invite reflection or commitment. A precise list of projects based on the strategic priorities of the College and its interface with the wider world should have been offered, from which candidates would have made a thoughtful choice. This would have allowed for a genuinely progressive leadership programme and deselected candidates who were not really interested in a progressive leadership agenda. A choice positively made, would have also allowed for the degree of ownership of the project that the participants from the first programme had suggested was necessary. It should also be pointed out that several participants were allowed on the programme without completing an application form.

### **The content**

As has already been suggested the departure of the principal meant that participants could choose to take their obligations on the programme less seriously and the departure of the internal coaches meant that there was reduced stimulus for reflection. Although the group had a similar response to the organisational culture questionnaire as the first group and received the same input about transition there was no reflection on either. This may have been because the group were less powerful in the organisation than the middle managers of programme one and were often not already in a position to lead others through change and be in a position to change the organisational culture of the College. There was, however, some pertinent and conscientious reflection on the process.

### **The Kolb cycle**

The Kolb cycle was viewed as a helpful tool for participants to help them gain momentum on their projects and the action learning sets were initially used in some cases to reinforce understanding of the process

'The KOLB cycle was reinforced and utilised for this exercise (sic). Full explanation of the purpose and completion of reflection log undertaken' (2ii)

'The theoretical input has I think helped clarify the definition of overall objectives and in this project helped clarify how help meet those objectives....Now I am looking to see if the 'cycle' framework can provide a basis for sustaining this process beyond an initial spurt.' (2i)

## **Action learning**

Initial action learning sets were used to make some of the projects which had been vague at the time of application more concrete.

‘( In action learning set) identified nine questions relevant to the project title and suggested three key questions that will receive priority attention over the coming 2 weeks’ (2ii)

‘The action learning set provided the opportunity to bond with my group. The action learning set made clear to me the direction in which my project was heading. This was very important to me as previous to the meeting I was confused as to what I was meant to be doing’ (2iii)

Action learning was also perceived as coaching and experienced as a positively.

‘(It was) very beneficial to receive support through coaching.’ (2iv)

It also led to concrete changes in practice. One participant decided to make his/her meetings ‘more teaching and learning focused’ and for the first time ‘had a separate meeting with course team to focus on teaching and learning.’ (2v)

## **The vision and the light**

There was also evidence that the work on vision, mission or light had been positive and had had an impact on the work of participants, who began using the language of ‘light’ and ‘alignment.’ One participant held a meeting in which:

‘Greater clarity was shared regarding the ‘light’ for the department in particular what was/is expected of team members & what avenues we should take in order to get there. The need for alignment with the external forces i.e. Edexcel and how this impacts upon the programme’s mission.’ (2vi)

Another participant found it ‘useful to gather opinions of everyone to share the “light”’ (2iv) while a support staff participant claimed how little his/her ‘own team feels that the (current) mission statement related to them

## **The distinction between leadership and management**

The distinction between leadership and management seems to have had an impact on the participants, one of whom wondered about the balance in her role between management and leadership towards the ‘light’, thus expressing a key middle management dilemma.



‘I was forced to review my role in light of some of the concerns expressed regarding how much management vs. leadership I should execute in order to manage/juggle the day to day tasks as well as ‘lead’ the team in the direction of the light’

There was also reflection on the application of the distinction between management and leadership on relationship with students, thus indicating a broader use for this distinction

‘Considered leadership and management theory-do I need to lead underachieving students in a different way to move in the right direction’

The idea that leadership requires the ability to overcome obstacles was also applied.

‘Decided to overcome new MIS (Management Information System) (Leadership and management) .....there for decided to be innovative and create my own data base’ (2vii)

### **Delegation, empowerment and time**

Participants also saw the link between delegation in particular and the creation of time for leadership. One participant considered it essential for the completion of his/her project to ‘identify areas where delegation could be improved’ (2vii) while another participant delegated ‘ updating records’ while she/he ‘monitored overall student progress’ (2viii)

There was no reference to empowerment, which might suggest that it is difficult to think in terms of empowering ones colleagues when the organisation is seen as ‘hierarchical, authoritarian and meritocratic’. (Chapter 4)

### **Completion interview**

The completion interview process was very fruitful and provided positive feedback on the programme as well as more constructive critical responses to the theory and pedagogy of the programme than the feedback process had done at the end of the first programme. This may be because the process of interview or questionnaire gave participants more freedom to express themselves. It may have also happened because the cohort was younger and less powerful in the organisation.

### **What theoretical input was most useful and why?**

All those who completed the course agreed that the distinction between leadership and management and the Bennis model were particularly useful.

‘I found models of leadership (Bennis model) very useful as it helped me to understand things better as a co-ordinator. The session on management versus leadership was beneficial as it allowed me to assess skills to understand whether I am a leader or manager’ (Qi)

The Bennis model also allowed one participant to identify areas she/he needed to develop.

‘...focusing on this model I realised where I had gaps and fell short in some of these characteristics. An example of this is in the leadership skill of coaching and mentoring.’ (Qiv)

While saying that none of the theory was useful enough to translate into practice, another member of the group used leadership theory to reflect on the nature of the then current leadership in the college.

‘One of the more interesting sessions was on the theory of leadership. In my opinion, the college lacked experienced leaders. Leadership has been based on instinct, common sense and copying the leadership styles of others. The Bennis model brought into focus, for those who wanted to see, the true skills required for successful leadership’ (Qiii)

One participant also found the concept of empowerment very useful.

‘as ...a coordinator I had often struggled with determining clear, healthy boundaries around distribution of day to day tasks. I often felt uncomfortable in delegating certain aspects of the workload, thinking that as a co-ordinator I was responsible for who does what. Following the session I had a better understanding of empowerment ..... and was able to view delegation and empowerment in a more positive light.’ (Qiv)

The analysis of organisational culture at the College was surprisingly referred to by only one person.

‘I found the work place culture analysis both interesting and informative, offering a useful tool for analysis, both personally and professionally’ (Qii)

Nearly all of the theory was then found useful by at least one participant. No one, however, referred to the transition curve or the constructivist model of identity even though guiding others through processes of change is a crucial part of leadership. The part of the programme that focussed on this was perhaps too abstract, in that some participants did not have teams they needed to guide and because the consultant should have started with real examples of colleagues of participants undergoing professional change and then applied the theory.

### **Were action-learning sets useful?**

There was universal agreement that action learning sets were useful not just for colleagues but also for students. Everybody also identified the logistical difficulties associated with arranging them.

‘Action- learning sets are potentially a very useful method and are worth exploring further, not only with staff but also with students. The logistical difficulties are many and

my own group in fact only managed one meeting. This was, however, useful and allowed us to see the potential.’(Qii)

The ‘distinct personalities’ generated by the ‘learning style questionnaire’ was identified as positive (Qi) and the coaching involved ‘enabled me to unlock potential to maximise performance’ (Qi) Another participants felt that action learning sets had been beneficial because they allowed for people to reflect together outside of their departments.

‘There is minimal opportunity to reflect on a cross-departmental basis, these meetings were welcome and beneficial.’

The personality and ability of the person conducting the action learning set are also important and one person’s name was constantly referred to by participants. Successful action learning sets require training and skilled facilitators.

### **How could the programme be improved?**

This was obviously a key question and although there was broad agreement amongst the participants. One participant however suggested that problems with the programme began with the selection process:

‘The application process was opaque and not well managed which meant that too much time was spent thinking about who and why. Additionally, some staff felt somewhat coerced. Any future programme should be transparent and widely disseminated’ (Qii)

Another participant suggested something else wrong with the programme, which could have been resolved with a clearer selection process.’

‘...it requires clarity of purpose. Where are we now, where are we heading etc’ (Qv)

The timing of the programme also came in for criticism, which contradicted the claim from the first programme that more time between sessions was required

‘The programme is disjointed. There is too much time between sessions...’(Qv)

This point of view was backed by another participant who also felt that placing the programme between 5 and 7 after college was problematic.

‘Two or three sessions per term are too infrequent and some will say giving a couple of hours after work to be an unreasonable imposition. That point of view aside, the reality is that it’s very difficult to be focussed, receptive and constructive at this time. If the college is serious about producing managers for the future, the programme should be built into the working day.’ (Qiii)

The most common criticism was however about the content and delivery of the programme, two aspects of the first programme that had not been criticised. One

participant felt that, although the Kolb cycle was potentially effective, the way she had been asked to reflect was too prescriptive and she suggested that a reflective journal would have been better. (Qvi). Another participant suggested that participants should decide '40% of topics for discussion.' (Qi) This was supported by a participant who felt that the course should have been constructed around the leadership skills required by the College, suggesting it was preferable to start with these skills and then 'to equip the participants with the theoretical skill to deliver.' (Qiii)

Significantly this desire to embed the theory in the practical needs of the college was backed up by another participant.

'For the future there might be some mileage in offering placements or acting-up/shadowing roles for people in order to act and reflect on the theories with more immediate first-hand experience. Additionally the college could explore some more time-limited tasks and projects with specific leadership elements.' (Qii)

It was also felt that the delivery of the programme was too theoretical and consultant-lead. There was a desire for more practical activity and more variety.

'Generally a good programme however I would have liked a greater variety of teaching/facilitating methods to be employed.' (Qiv)

It was also clear from another participant that 'delivery was insufficiently varied' and should have been 'more activity based and not centred on teacher delivery'

These were all constructive criticisms, with which I have sympathy. Also none of these suggestions were made by the participants of the first programme. Although there was no questionnaire or interview we met many times to reform the first programme. As I have already suggested, it may have been the 'lower' organisational location of participants that gave them the freedom to be constructively critical. Also the absence of the principal/sponsor and senior management involvement might have given them greater freedom. In the first programme participants were already middle managers and were perhaps too closely tied to the sponsor's agenda.

### **Was your original project successful in any way?**

For the organisation and for the sake of evaluating the impact of the programme it was important to discover if the original project that had been the focus of the leadership programme participation had been successful. In fact only one participant who completed the programme felt his/her project had been successful (Qiv). It was probably not coincidental that the achievement of this project was essential for the participant to effectively carry out his/her role.

Where the project had somewhat ambitiously been supplementary to a demanding role or perhaps had been suggested by the vague list on the application form the projects were abandoned

‘Initially it was successful due to action learning set.....reflection template was useful in tracking changes and concrete doing. Although project was partially completed, it was not successful due to lack of coaching and obtaining data, which was time consuming (Qi)

‘No. A good idea, but the reality is that, for an employee on my level, with a time priority given to preparing to teach, teaching, and monitoring students’ progress, It’s not going to get done’(Qiii)

In both cases availability of time was an obstacle to successful completion of the programme. The options are to make sure that projects are intrinsically part of an existing role or to review the time frame in which leadership programme are delivered to allow for successful project engagement. It also seems to be the case that participants in leadership programme also need to be in a position where they are already responsible for other colleagues.

### **Is there any influence from the programme on your work at the moment?**

In general participants felt that there was a positive influence

‘.it helped me build relationships with colleagues (within and outside the department) and I am reminded of the skills required for effective leadership’ (Qiii)

‘Some of the thinking behind organisational culture theory etc is of some use in considering how to develop the .....culture’ (Qii)

One of the participants was really clear about the influence on his/her professional behaviour

- Increased ease with creating an environment where team members take ownership of tasks
- Greater confidence in delegating certain aspects of workload
- A greater emphasis on developing a vision.....
- Significantly improved working relations..... (Qiv)

There was, however, one exception to the positive feedback when one participant, who felt they understood leadership already, said that there had been no way in which the programme had changed him (Qv)

### **Should the college be running an internal leadership programme and why?**

It was essential to gather evidence to justify a third leadership programme in a new regime and organisational culture and all participants felt that an internal leadership programme was necessary.

‘Managing a course, programme or department is often very challenging, particularly around areas such as time management, team dynamics, and leadership styles etc. Programme such as this equip staff with the opportunity to reflect (possibly through the Kolb cycle) share experiences and gain feedback from colleagues. The outcome of this amounts to more effective and confident teacher/manager practitioners’ (Qiv)

‘Yes. It is essential that the college develops effective leaders in areas it sees as a priority. The alternative is to prepare for failure or discontentment from staff that are leapfrogged by outsiders. Some people may not want career progression, others may not be capable, this too should be recognised by way of the review and development (appraisal) system.’ (Qiii)

Although by the time the Boyatzis material was shared with the group they were no longer actively reflective, all completing participants identified the creation of relationships or a ‘reference group’ in which we interpret our progress on desired change give support and feedback’ as a key factor in the need for future leadership programme. Even the participant, who felt that there had been no influence on him personally from the programme, said that the college nevertheless needed an internal leadership programme for ‘shared commitment, focus and vision.’ (Qv)

As cost would be another factor in the continuation of the programme, I also asked participants (although I didn’t record the answer apart from in one case. Qvi) if the leadership programme could continue without a consultant. They felt that after two years managing and experiencing the programme I was in a position to lead it without a consultant, thus giving the college an effective leadership programme which no longer cost £15,000.

## **Conclusion**

Even though it would have been possible to run the programme cheaply and completing participants felt strongly that there should be an internal leadership programme, the second leadership programme was to be the last, at least for the time being, run at College X. The programme had lost their sponsor and their coaches and the inspection in November 2005 had been relatively unsuccessful. Basically the academic strategy, the PDU and the leadership programme were associated with the sponsor’s attempt at transforming the organisation through the building of consensus and they also symbolised the exclusion from that process of the senior management team. They were associated with a previous regime and would inevitably disappear.

There were also flaws in the structure of the leadership programme. It ought to have been possible to design a programme less vulnerable to the departure of the sponsor. The SMT should have been involved so that the projects of participants had line manager support. In the language of ‘From Little Acorns’ the programme needed an openness that challenged any notion of tribes or cliques’ and required ‘counter-activity that took forward improvements to other areas.’ There was no such activity.

The application process was also insufficiently 'transparent' and at times coercive. There were too many participants and not all were sufficiently engaged with the process or personally ambitious. It is not a sign of a successful programme or of value for money when the programme cost £15,000 that 5 people left the programme, especially when three left for reasons that could have been anticipated from the first programme.

It should have been clear, not only that projects required line manager support but also that any would be participant who failed to identify a project should not have participated in the programme. There should have also been more direction about projects, so that they programme had transformed the organisation in any way although the aim of the programme was to prepare future leaders and in this it was perhaps more successful.

The programme should have also anticipated the possible departure of internal coaches from the organisation. It might have been possible to find a mechanism to train more coaches in the organisation as coaching and action learning sets were greatly valued by participants in both programme and would be valued by all I suspect.

Coaching was certainly a stimulus to reflection and given again the cost of the programme it seems a shame that no strategy was identified to guarantee engagement in reflection on the second programme after the failure of some to reflect on the first programme. I remain doubtful that the Kolb cycle needs following to the letter, but more progress seems to have been made by those who engaged in a genuine process of reflection.

For the first time it also became clear that delivery and content could be improved. Given that the College's academic strategy focused on active learning it is surprising that I allowed the delivery to be so 'teacher centred.' Also my 'intelligent, widely read informant' who suggested to me the first programme was insufficiently grounded in what leaders and managers actually did seems to have been correct. Participants in the second programme certainly required some control of content and they wanted the theory integrated with College activity.

It should not be forgotten, however, that participants were very positive about their experience, observing amongst other things that action learning sets and the distinction between leadership and management were helpful also for students. They all felt that a programme such as the one they had experienced should have continued at the college.

In addition to the theoretical assumptions underpinning this case study several improvements to leadership programme were being suggested mostly about methodology and pedagogy. The theory was still valued as were coaching and action learning sets as stimuli for reflection but participants wanted more ownership of course content, more practical links to the place where they were working and the kind of active learning that was seen as good practice in the classroom. Finally the issue of who should attend these programmes and how participants should be identified became more significant. While compared to the first programme there was more ambition for career progression there

was still the feeling that there had been coercion. The flaws that the participants in the second programme identified would have allowed for the design of a better programme.

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## **CHAPTER 8 AFTER THE LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME 2006-2011**

### **Introduction**

In order to evaluate both leadership programmes further, it is of value to compare the philosophy of change that underpinned them with the subsequent approach to change at College X and the approach at College Y when I later joined it. In some ways these subsequent experiences constitute a continuation of the case study that investigates the features of successful programme developing leadership of academic change in inner-London sixth form colleges. They give my understanding of leadership and change in inner-London FE further depth.

It is clear that the analysis that follows falls particularly prey to the charge of subjectivity that can be levelled against case studies in general. However I would argue that it still reflects the set of virtues cited in chapter 2, in particular ‘an interest in clarity and communication’ and ‘concern for evidence’.

### **After the leadership programme at College X**

Leadership in education is fundamentally about academic change; transforming teaching and learning, improving the student experience and outcomes. Unsurprisingly the former principal and the new principal agreed on the importance of academic change but differed in approach. The intellectual and abstract was replaced by the pragmatic and systems driven approach. The College abandoned the Academic Strategy and focused on performance management and perfecting systems. It became risk averse in order to achieve better assessments from Ofsted. It did not articulate a ‘light’ or shared moral purpose of an inner city sixth form College. Paperwork was transformed and self-assessment tightened. It is as if there was an inclination to over-correct the perceived errors of the past in which the college was too focused on vision and values and seen as insufficiently managerial. The College focused on managerial control at the expense of vision and purpose.

Previously the PDU had provided teaching and learning staff development and it had been the responsibility of the heads of department in the Academic Board to drive teaching and learning transformation. In the new regime the College appointed teaching and learning champions to drive academic change. The staff development focus of the PDU on themes such as differentiation was replaced with staff development run by the champions on very concrete issues such as organising group work but the champions also worked individually with all teaching staff to help them plan for lesson observation and ultimately for Ofsted.

I became Manager for Learning with a focus on lesson observation and report and policy writing. Departments worked on academic change but were at risk of stasis as Boyatzis points out that 'existing reference groups might have an investment in staying the same'.

The College policy towards leadership development after the abandonment of the leadership programme also changed. It decided to rely on external bodies for leadership training such as the Centre for Excellence in Leadership and the Network for Black Professionals. The Centre for Excellence in Leadership (now part of LSIS) ran free training for minority groups and the College attempted to recruit sufficient numbers of these for their programme. The College failed to do so and although some staff shadowed leaders under the auspices of the Network for Black Professionals, the reality is that there was no replacement leadership programme at the College and no corresponding professional learning community.

The importance for successful organisational change of the creation of professional learning communities such as those developed in the leadership programme has increasingly been recognised. In 'It's About Time: Productive Pedagogues and Professional Learning Communities, Sandra Sytsma (<http://www.ucalgary.ca/iejll/vol10/sytsma2> 2006) emphasises the importance of communities of learning. She criticizes the idea that it is possible to learn and develop in isolation.

'However, each on their own, teachers are only able to learn through their own habitual perspectives. To learn together through multiple perspectives broadens and deepens the path of learning. The productive pedagogue interested in making the most of learning, in being expansively creative and productive, also acknowledges that he or she is a social learner who learns most effectively when in community with others'

At the time of the leadership programme the college focused too much perhaps on vision at the expense of systems and both cohorts represented a learning community, too isolated from senior management and the rest of the College. Also it is true to say that the leadership programme was too abstract and insufficiently rooted in practice both at College level and relative to changes in the sector. It would not be unreasonable to claim that an opportunity was missed after the second leadership programme to bring a more practical and pragmatic approach to bear on an existing approach to change in the college rather than abandoning it all together. Then there might have been a creative and productive synthesis between leadership and management and between the theoretical approach of one regime and the pragmatic approach of the other.

The theoretical input of the leadership programme would however suggest that the mostly pragmatic and managerial approach might not achieve positive change because there was less work on shared moral purpose and the college remained tribal. The driver for change was extrinsic and involved satisfying Ofsted. The approach was task and systems driven rather than focused on leadership.

It is undeniable that this new pragmatic, systems driven approach and the focus on Ofsted provided for the staff something more tangible than the strategy of the previous regime that had left some confused. Also it is an approach that is common in the sector. However AS level success rates did not noticeably improve and the outcomes of the Ofsted inspection of November 2010 were not positive. According to the inspection team, although self-assessment was rigorous at the College, 'arrangements to improve the quality of teaching and learning are not yet sufficiently rigorous'. (Full inspection 2010) It was also felt that there was a need to 'improve the arrangements for the observation of teaching and learning so that there is a real focus on evaluating learning' and to 'support staff to develop stimulating and challenging lessons and to share existing good practice so that their teaching has a demonstrable impact on students' progress.

It is impossible to speculate about what situation the College may have been in by 2010 had the PDU driven approach still been absorbed into a more pragmatic approach but it seems clear that the change of direction had not lead to genuine academic change. This is not to claim that the previous approach to change had been successful. The 2005 inspection, although not as negative as the 2010 inspection, had not been a ringing endorsement.

## **College Y**

After a brief period of time in charge of Higher Education at College X, In 2009 I was appointed as quality improvement manager at College Y, a similar rival, local College. I had said about College X that the workforce was a 'volatile and complex mix of age-groups, friendships, enmities and values that could theoretically combine to resist change'. Although my new College was formed at the same time and had similar mixes of ages and longevity of service I found a completely different atmosphere where, although morale had been low, cynicism and resistance were much less developed. It is of course impossible to say why this is the case. It is possible that previous regimes at Leyton had contributed to this or it is even possible that fortuitously the people who worked at Leyton were just different. It could all have been just a question of key personalities in the organisation. What was important, however, was that my experience at Leyton had shown me that my assumption that tribal cultures were inevitable in sixth form colleges was not necessarily true and that this case study needed opening up to fresh perspectives to increase their reliability.

I found myself back in a role which focused on professional learning and where I gave what suspiciously resembled colloquia (although they weren't called that) to a significantly more motivated staff. To use the language of Bennis I also had more leverage as I had been promoted to a level beyond the heads of department, although I was still not in senior management. I also found myself line managed by a new Principal who had started at the College just before me. His approach was different to that of both the Principals I had previously worked with but it coincided more strongly with some of what I had learned about leadership and academic change since becoming head of the PDU

One of the first things the new principal did was to work on the moral purpose or light of the college by developing a new mission statement in conjunction with staff, students and governors

‘Working within a safe, welcoming and stimulating environment, which embraces diversity and promotes respect, we help students fulfil their academic potential and become thinking, questioning and caring members of society.

There was also a relentless focus on teaching and learning, for the sake primarily of students. While Ofsted was taken seriously, the leadership discourse of the College emphasises that nothing is ever done for the sake of Ofsted. In this spirit paper work was reduced and no lesson observations were graded so that their focus was exclusively developmental and they were not part of a performance management approach

There was regular, cross-college professional dialogue. Some departments were formally observed, some partook in peer review and others e in peer review with other departments. Furthermore there were informal teaching squares which exemplify the kind of professional learning community and teacher learning that is seen as important in positive processes of change. Everything was done to challenge the notion of tribe and to make the whole college work together and share values and approaches.

There was furthermore an in-house focus on leadership and management development and the Principal, like me had experience of working in conjunction with universities to run in-college leadership programme. This time this programme fitted in neatly with the general vision of the organisation rather than being at odds with it. The college saw itself as a learning organisation

The regime at College Y has recognised the need to combat tribal cultures in a way that the regime at the time of the leadership programme failed to do. The new Principal had inherited a staff with low morale and there had been a clear attempt to create a common purpose and direction. All staff have come together in working parties to devise the lesson observation approach and the quality improvement framework amongst other things, so that there is genuine collective ownership of the College’s strategy. There is a palpable sense at the College of a shared purpose although it could be argued that this was easier to achieve at a College where the staff were generally not cynical.

Not only did my professional experience and learning suggest that College Y adopted the right approach to change but in May 2010 Ofsted confirmed that they thought so too. I was made College Ofsted nominee and as such had to represent the College to the inspection team. They were convinced that in a relatively short time considerable change had occurred. Although learner outcomes were not uniformly impressive, we were identified as a good college for overall effectiveness, learner outcomes, quality of provision, meeting the needs of learners, equality and diversity and safeguarding. Most importantly we were identified as a good College with respect to leadership and management and capacity to improve. The effectiveness with which managers raised

expectations and promoted ambition was considered outstanding. To paraphrase the former Principal of College X (see chapter 5) it was possible to improve teaching and learning in a London context and have positive judgements about effectiveness by external organisations. The approach at Leyton seemed to have begun at least the process of surfing the dialectic between the local needs of the College and its students and national improvement agendas as represented by Ofsted.

### **Leadership programme experiences**

In College Y I have also been able to apply what I have learned from the content of the leadership programme in a more or less informal setting. A group of younger staff were promoted to middle managers and approached me even though it was not part of my role to mentor them. I organised them into a group and ran sessions based on the content of the leadership programme. There have been successful sessions based on Harrison's diagnosis of organisational culture and the differences between management and leadership. The leadership programme has not only given me a framework for organising such sessions but also the confidence and coaching skills to do so.

I have also experienced other leadership training initiatives which have allowed me to review the effectiveness of the original leadership programme. I was part of the south of the borough 'Aspiring Senior Leader Weekend. In this event we gave participants a presentation to prepare and then observed their team work and understanding of the task as well as their final presentation. The group I belonged to ran a session on the transition process or the kind of grieving and anxiety that occurs when moving from middle to senior management as well as on the opportunities that senior leadership provides. Finally we observed the participants responding to role-played critical incidents.

I believe it was my experience on the leadership programme that gave me the confidence to fulfil this role. This kind of approach to leadership development turned out to be very useful. By the end of the weekend we were able to give clear and effective feedback to participants about their readiness for senior leadership and the participants themselves were able to make a moiré informed judgement about their desire for promotion. In the Conference evaluation participants were 100% positive about the session on transition.

One of the weaknesses of both leadership programmes had been that not all participants were appropriate for the programme. This skill-based approach, lacking from the leadership programme, could be a way of identifying suitable participants, although it should be remembered that the leadership programme were not just for middle managers moving into senior management but for staff at all levels.

Currently at College Y we are running a leadership programme for staff from all levels of the organisation in conjunction with the Institute of Education. Its focus and organisation offer a useful contrast to the leadership programmes which have been the focus of this work so far. Firstly the programme is accredited and leads to a 60 credit post graduate certificate. It requires essay submission rather than reflective writing. I do feel that experience has shown this to be correct. Participants in the leadership programme asked

to reflect on their experience often failed to do so even though public money was being spent on their development. Essay submission seems more appropriate and rigorous than the somewhat vague reflective process I was asking participants to carry out. It would however have been possible to formalise the reflective process and make submission a condition of certification in the leadership programme at College X.

The Institute also insists that the project carried out by participants reflects the three year strategic plan of the College, which would avoid the problem of uncertain projects of uncertain relevance to the College's vision. The following list of projects indicates their relevance and their awareness, in some cases, of the unique inner-London context in which staff are working.

- Managing change in curriculum based gifted and talented provision
- A review of the role of the assistant programme manager
- Good practice in seeking and responding to the student voice
- Work shadowing for the continuing professional development of travel and tourism teachers
- How do we put students at the heart of what we do? An investigation into tutorial systems and provision
- Use of technology: the extent to which student experience is being enhanced by effective use of ICT
- College Y students and the problem of cultural capital: how to lead and manage the delivery of key stage 5 English with a focus on increasing enrichment and achievement
- Support staff development at College Y
- The development of a sense of college since 2009
- Financial issues surrounding the study of Art and Design
- A collaborative study to define the brand value of College Y
- The usefulness of educational trips
- E learning
- How to implement a cross college policy on independent learning
- How to embed the concept of advocacy into the tutors' role at College Y
- A critical examination of equality and diversity issues in relation to promotion opportunities for ethnic minority staff
- The effectiveness of enrichment provision as perceived by students
- Promoting the achievements of black male students
- Peer coaching to improve teaching and learning
- How does the ICT offer match the needs of students and the experience of staff?
- The usefulness of inter college meetings to vocational provision
- An analysis of the effectiveness of meetings

Finally the Institute of Education postgraduate certificate focused on the nature, outcomes and impact of collaborative enquiry thus emphasising the importance of professional learning communities. 22 participants took part and each of them had their own professional learning community and many sent questionnaires to all staff. There was

also a presentation from each participant attended by most senior and middle managers. The tentacles of this programme reached all corners of the organisation in a way that neither of the original leadership programmes had achieved.

The intended content suggested by the Principal for the collaboration with the Institute of Education was also less abstract than the content of the leadership programme, although there is much that is similar. It would fulfil the need to place leadership in the wider FE context and focus on leadership skills as can be seen from the following outline:

1. So why are leadership and management such a big deal?
2. The differences and similarities between 'leadership' and 'management'.
3. Organisational cultures
4. Structures and systems
5. The external setting: putting further education in a wider context
6. Managing people
7. Managing change and improvement
8. Do I have what it takes? The skills and qualities I need to progress

There is also a commitment to complete the programme with those dropping out being expected to pay money back to the College. This would have prevented some people dropping out of the Leadership programme at College X

As was to be expected, there were still flaws in this collaboration with the Institute of Education. The need of the Institute to fulfil academic standards relating to methodology and ethics clashed with the intended leadership and management content proposed by the college. There was only time for the first 5 sessions suggested by the College and there was sometimes a sense of frustration that what mattered to the College was being squeezed out.

There was also no coaching content on the programme. The relationship between me, the Principal and the IOE tutor with the participants was like the relationship between a university tutor and her students. We responded to various stages of written work in more or less encouraging ways. Also I cannot help wondering how these written documents will lead to genuine change in the organisation. The reduced leadership and management content means that I cannot see participants developing the kind of sophisticated blueprint for an innovative organisation created by the participants of the first leadership programme.

## **Conclusion**

Passing the first and second leadership programme through the prism of subsequent experiences has increased my understanding of what is required to develop programme for the leadership of change in inner-London sixth form colleges. Without an opportunity for contrasting different approaches to change and approaches to leadership my ability to evaluate the success of the leadership programme on their own terms and make recommendations that are potentially applicable elsewhere would have been impoverished. The value of the leadership programme has also been demonstrated in that

it has given me the theoretical sensitivity to interpret new situations and the confidence to take on new challenges.



## **CHAPTER 9 WHAT MAKES AN EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME.**

### **Introduction**

Yin (2009: 186) says that ‘a sense of completeness is as important in doing a case study as it is in defining a complete series of laboratory experiments (or in completing a symphony or finishing a painting).’ In spite of the ‘inconcludability’ of the work-based context referred to in chapter 2 it feels that this case study is as far as possible complete. This is not only because I have been researching attempts to develop leadership capacity in inner-London education since 2004 but also because I feel that I have reached the ‘analytic periphery’ (Yin: 2009:186) of this case study and that any further information would be of ‘decreasing relevance’.

McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (2003: 178) also comment that ‘a common error of report writing is to concentrate on the descriptions but not to document the learning.’ So what follows is a narrative of the development of my learning about what constitutes an effective, internally run leadership programme in inner-London.

### **Learning from the first leadership programme**

The most significant impact of the first programme was the way in which it made tacit knowledge and experience explicit. The discussion of leadership and management, organisational culture, role, power and authority, delegation and empowerment allowed us to put labels on organisational phenomena that we had perhaps half understood or not had the language to explore. In this sense the content of the programme was effective. McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (2003: 132) in fact emphasises the importance of making tacit knowledge and understanding explicit in a process of organisational improvement.

‘Many researchers draw on the idea of tacit knowledge as the basis of good practice (see e.g. Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Steinberg and Horvath, 1999). They explain how organisations may be improved first by encouraging people to share their tacit knowledge about their work and then to go through processes of making this knowledge more and more explicit: first to share their values and then to find ways in which they can live out their values’

Certainly the content of the programme facilitated the process of sharing knowledge and understanding. In spite of the wide range of possible leadership inputs I felt it was suitable for future leadership programmes. However other content could have been equally effective. In an attack on management theory Matthew Stewart (2009:302)

suggests that an investigation into humanities disciplines would be preferable to a study of leadership:

‘The central insights of management theory are, in fact, the stock in trade of humanities disciplines. The gurus’ tips on organisational politics are all there in Machiavelli’s description of Roman and Florentine politics, not to mention Thucydides on the Peloponnesian War or William Faulkner on the American South. There is probably more to learn from studying the defects of King Lear’s “management style” than there is from reading articles about Michael Eisner’s shortcomings as CEO of Disney. If you want wisdom from a deeply troubled individual complaining that man is born free but everywhere in chains, then Jean Jacques Rousseau is a better bet than Tom Peters. The analysis of meaning and the emphasis on understanding context that characterise good teaching in the humanities, too, can count as important preparation for prospective managers’.

Whatever the content of the programme, action learning was an effective mechanism for making shared knowledge explicit and enabled me to link my understanding of Aristotle’s claim that you only become virtuous by performing virtuous acts to developing a set of ‘leadership virtues in colleagues. . To repeat the definition used in the programme participants in action learning leadership programmes need to:

1. Define a problem situation to be improved
2. Design intervention
3. Implement intervention
4. Evaluate impact of intervention
5. Design new more effective intervention

The positive characteristics of this process are identified in ‘The Good Research Guide’ (Denscombe 2010: 126)

*‘Practical nature.* It is aimed at dealing with real-world problems and issues, typically at work and in organisational settings.

*Change.* Both as a way of dealing with practical problems and as a means of discovering more about phenomena, change is regarded as an integral part of research.

*Cyclical process.* Research involves a feedback loop in which initial findings generate possibilities for change which are then implemented and evaluated as a prelude to further investigation.

*Participation.* Practitioners are the crucial people in the research process. Participation is active not passive

I also began to understand however that action learning following the Kolb Cycle was not unproblematic. Evaluation of the programme content and the project through reflection, stimulated by coaching was to be an integral part of a process. It was however very

difficult to generate this reflection. Participants either didn't link leadership practice with theory provided by the consultant or didn't submit reflections at all. Reflection is an important part of professional life but as Moon (2004) suggested programme ought not to presuppose that highly paid professionals are effective at reflecting on practice. Participants in any leadership programme where they are required to reflect need guidance and support in so doing. Even had they received this guidance it was potentially bizarre to submit this reflection for the scrutiny of a peer and to assume that issues of organisational power would not play a role in willingness to share reflections on the nature of a hierarchically structured organisation.

Coaching, which was designed, to stimulate reflection, emerging as it does, from therapeutic practice and constructivist psychology is also not entirely unproblematic as far as the operation of power is concerned. It is based on the development of the individual alone as professionally effective and can therefore disguise conflict and the operation of discourses of organisational power. In other words it exaggerates the possibility of agency and underplays the possibility of actions being constrained. If, to echo the description of personal construct theory from chapter 3, the coach is challenging and replacing constructions of professional reality of the person she is coaching, how can it be decided that the existing construction is faulty or that there is a better construction unless this decision is informed by the power driven values of an organisation?

Participants, however, really appreciated both being coached and participating in action learning sets which are a form of communal coaching. Coaching gave participants confidence, guidance and a mechanism for reviewing their practice and goals. A colleague facilitator from the first programme recently described the process of being coached and coaching on the programme as being instrumental in his career development. It is also important to understand that coaching represents a more caring leadership practice than those found in traditional hierarchical organisations. Coaching as a leadership tool should therefore be integrated into leadership programmes and educational practice as long as it is engaged with critically.

Coaching, however, was less helpful where participants could not identify a suitable improvement project. It was not surprising that where there was no project to reflect upon participants dropped out of the programme.

Even those projects that were chosen by participants were insufficiently focused on academic change and the inner-London context. There had been no direction concerning an appropriate inner-London focus for projects. I feel now that a menu of projects should be provided for the participants to choose from because:

- It is important that the local, inner-London context is reflected in the work of participants. There is a potentially wide range of projects with an inner-London focus. These might include promoting equality and diversity in the classroom and working with faith groups to challenge extremist narratives, amongst many others

- Changing relationships and the culture of an organisation is as important as changing practice. I would have therefore encouraged some participants to focus on coaching and mentoring in their teams in order to spread this approach.
- Even in relatively progressive organisations there is still a tendency to take refuge behind the shield of professional autonomy and not allow practice in the classroom to be the focus of research. I would have insisted on teaching and learning projects focused on interventions such as questioning, problem based learning and assessment for learning etc.
- Insufficient focus on the world outside the College had left it unprepared for Ofsted's visit in 2005.

While participants need to be fundamentally motivated by the projects they choose there should be a focus on inner-London, coaching and mentoring, teaching and learning, and centrally directed change and the wider educational world. Bottery in 'The Challenges of Educational Leadership' (2004:213) says that 'leadership of a value-driven and essentially moral organisation *needs* to ask awkward questions about the policy networks that facilitate, constrain, or direct the work of education'

It is in fact an important development in my understanding of leadership programmes that they need to identify the organisational values and educational values that drive them. There is no leadership without values, mission or guiding 'light' to align and direct professional practice. A discussion of values needs to be part of induction for any programme in order to frame it and give it a telos. To echo Aristotle again, there is no point in leadership development or being in education at all unless the 'what for' question can be answered. It has transpired during this case study that the telos for inner-London colleges is to meet the needs of its students by resolving the tension between locally generated strategies and external measurement and scrutiny and between determinism and agency. To quote McNiff again (2006) 'we need to live our live our values in our practice' and 'make our values our standard of judgement.'

Finally it was clear that leadership programmes would not be effective if they were not part of a shared organisational culture. To use terminology adopted by Coleman and Early (2005: 53) 'collegiality' is seen as a desirable feature of educational leadership and amongst other features it requires 'a common set of values' and for 'decisions to be reached through consensus'. College X was not collegiate at the time of the first leadership programme

### **Learning from the second leadership programme**

The lessons from the second programme were mostly related to failure. The programme along with the work of the PDU had not had a positive impact on student performance or teaching and learning and Ofsted had been negative about the college. The leadership programmes had acted as an island of experimental practice in an environment which was not collegiate and in which contradictory pressures and practices continued to exist. As soon as the sponsor departed those practices and pressures surfaced and the programme

was destined not to be continued into a third term. Failure is, however, itself a source of learning in action learning according to McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (2003: 13)

‘It does not matter if the social situation does not reach successful closure; it probably will not because any new solution allows new questions to emerge. What does matter is that you show your own process of learning, and explain how your new learning has helped you to develop your work within the situation’

The closure of the programme helped me understand that leadership programmes should take place within an overall organisational culture that is consistent with its values so that they at least have the potential to survive changes of regime and that it needed to have an impact on staff and students in the college as a whole. In spite of these problems it was clear that the programme had been valued because it had allowed for a cross college focus on change that might otherwise have been missing.

There were other lessons from the second programme. The selection process was tighter and there were participants who were lower down the hierarchy but more ambitious for leadership. A leadership programme designed for middle managers exclusively, as was the first, would miss out on this enthusiasm and desire for change.

Also for the first time the content and delivery of the programme had been criticised by some participants. Whatever the content of a programme, its impact is negated if the methodology by which it is delivered is not adequate. Leadership development, like all continuing professional development, needs to model the kind of active learning known to be effective in the classroom. While it is commonly considered that adults are motivated if their learning is based on problem solving and is of immediate professional concern to them, this is not enough. Most participants in the leadership programme described here felt that learning was too centrally directed and consultant dependent. As adults and professionals there was also the view that they themselves were in a position to choose and develop some of the content themselves.

In *Pedagogy of Freedom* (1998: 49-50) Paulo Freire wrote:

‘As a teacher in an education programme, I cannot be satisfied simply with nice, theoretical elaborations regarding the ontological, political and epistemological basis of educational practice. My theoretical explanation of such practice ought to be also a concrete and practical demonstration of what I am saying: a kind of incarnation joining theory and practice.’

Over reliance on power point and the knowledge transition method can stifle the motivation of the keenest future leader. Training in general and leadership programme in particular must stimulate curiosity in participants and those providing the professional development alike, in a learning organization where everybody is still learning. It could also be pointed out that the consultant as the centrally located transmitter of knowledge and understanding and the exclusive provider of materials contradicts the distributive

model of leadership that all programme experienced during this case study attempt to promote.

If participants are to give up their own time training needs to be effective and programme organisers need to be sensitive to how often sessions take place. Participants in the first programme felt the time demands had been too great while participants in the second leadership programme felt that the gap between sessions was too long and that momentum was lost. Either way decisions needed to be made about regularity of input.

### **Learning after leadership programme 1 and 2**

At College Y I learned more about organisational culture, about leadership and about other ways of conducting leadership programmes. Firstly the benefits of making leadership programmes available to all became clear. In the first leadership programme at College X all the participants had been middle managers. They were approached and asked to participate on the theoretical basis that middle managers were the impetus for academic change and might be the next generation of senior leaders. However only those selected to be coaches had any ambitions to be future leaders.

The second programme also involved a process of coercion, although an application form had been designed to avoid some of the problems of the first programme. Although the participants were not all middle managers they were considered to be mostly able members of the college and again did not always want promotion. There was, however, more enthusiasm for promotion than in the first cohort. There was at least an application form although it omitted to share with candidates a list of the skills and characteristics that would be needed were they to be promoted to the next level.

There was for the College Y programme on the other hand an open process of application and anyone with ambition to participate could do so, independently of their reputations and location in the organisation. All that was required was an expression of interest and a project proposal. Perhaps a properly designed application form should have been produced.

Allowing anyone to apply, meant the programme had a broader impact on the organisation as a whole. People worked together who would not normally work together because of their position in the hierarchy. It is also clear that lessons about leadership are also lessons about teaching and learning and therefore valuable whatever one's location in an organisation. A so called 'grass root' teacher is a leader and manager in the classroom with her students and with her colleagues.

John Adair claims it is a mistake to concentrate on people who are at the top of organisations (The rise of the new leader. <http://trainingzone.co.uk> 2008)

'The big heresy of our times, fuelled by America, is that all you have to do is to get the top level right. Lots of organisations have poured 80% of their resources and money into

the top 10-20% percent and they have forgotten the rest. What we know is you have to have excellence at all levels and work as a team.'

Daniel Kahneman (2011: 205) would also suggest that focusing on the top person is inappropriate. He asks a very simple question.

'Suppose you consider many pairs of firms. The two firms in each pair are generally similar but the CEO of one of them is better than the other. How often will you find that the firm with the stronger CEO is the more successful of the two?'

His answer is that because of the unpredictability of the world in which we live in only 60% of the pairs of firms led is the stringer firm led by the better CEO. Luck and unpredictability may play a significant part in the relative success of College X and College Y.

This is not to suggest that the top person in an organisation is unimportant. It is to reinforce the idea that concentrating leadership development on the middle and top tier alone misses the point of the value of leadership programmes which is to promote reflection and engagement at all levels of an organisation.

Another intended consequence of College Y's open policy was the participation of support staff in the programme, thus promoting the idea of 'excellence at all levels' and creating a professional learning community within the college that broke down the traditional barriers between teaching and support staff.

It was also clear that university accreditation was a better idea than internal certification. If a programme is accredited there will always be a process of research and a formal written outcome. This means that the projects of participants reach out to the whole organisation through questionnaires and focus groups and that the programme goes some way towards achieving the goal of 'having a positive impact' in a way that the programmes at College X did not.

Without formal accreditation and essay writing it was almost impossible to make the participants on the College X write anything at all. In contrast all 22 participants on the College Y programme will submit 10,000 word essays focused on their projects

The disadvantage of an accredited programme is that too much ownership of the programme could be handed over to the university and that the programme might lack the leadership expertise of a trainer or consultant. These problems are, however, soluble through appropriate negotiations with partner organisations and if there is sufficient leadership expertise within the organisation. The partner organisation can be less demanding without sacrificing its academic standards and leaders within the organisation can focus on issues to do with leadership and management. On balance and if these conditions are in place it seems that an accredited programme is to be preferred.

Whitehead is quoted in Whitehead and McNiff (2006: 21) describing the ideal relationship between college and university in action research:

‘the work of teachers should be supported (but not directed) by higher education personnel, who would in turn provide intellectual and emotional support to the teachers, as well as advice about further resources and pathways to accreditation’

It is worth pointing out here that universities also benefit from this kind of relationship with schools and colleges as it allows academics to develop theory through engagement with practice.

The research process and formal essay, however, has its disadvantages when compared with the process of reflection expected in the first leadership programme described in this case study. It is relatively abstract and directed outwards at various phenomena in the organisation. There is much less inwardly directed critical reflection about roles and practice. The coaching, reflective process in the College X programme led to a greater amount of self-analysis and was better at fulfilling the goals of providing ‘analytical and practical tools ‘to prepare for leadership.

The supposed dichotomy between abstract formal writing and reflective writing is however false. It would have been possible to ask participants on the university accredited programme to keep a reflective journal about what they had learned about themselves and the processes of leadership and change.

Reflection is an important part of professional life but as Moon (2004) suggested programme ought not to presuppose that highly paid professionals are effective at reflecting on practice. Participants in leadership programme where they are required to reflect need guidance and support in so doing.

Participants also require proper guidance about action research. From my understanding action research or learning is research or learning about action and involves the investigation of an intervention. If, on the other hand, the research carried out by a participant is purely descriptive of a state of affairs and involves no analysis of an intervention it is not action research. Denscombe quotes Somekh (2010:127) ‘Action research (rejects) the concept of a two stage process in which research is carried out first by researchers and then in a separate second stage the knowledge generated from the research is applied by practitioners. Instead the two processes of research and action are integrated (Somekh 1995: 34)

Too many of the College Y projects fit the model of the ‘two stage process’ in which action and research are not integrated. In a successful leadership programme which claims action learning at its core, it is important to properly define action learning and make sure that actions rather than states of affairs are researched. While it is useful for example, to analyse meetings, departmental structures or sense of college, there is in these cases no intervention or research and action integration which could lead to obvious impact and change. Also where there is no focus on personal action then a leadership programme doesn’t have the self-critical, reflective element that prepares for future leadership roles.



The way in which the College Y programme tried to compensate for the absence of personal action was through the emphasis provided by the Institute of Education on professional learning communities. Each participant was expected to involve a learning community with their project and would thereby reflect on their ability to engage a group of people in their research over which they had no hierarchically derived authority or power. Their reflections on leadership and management were to derive from their experience of this process.

It is undeniable that the formal identification of the importance of collaborative learning and the establishment of research communities extending beyond the participants in the programme was missing from the College X programme. There was a tacit understanding that we were a professional learning community but to name and investigate such communities as part of the programme would have made them more effective. To quote Systema again (2006): 'to learn together through multiple perspectives broadens and deepens the path of learning'. Boyatzis (2002) has also asked: 'are you developing relationships as part of the learning progress?'

Michael Fullan in *Leading Professional Learning* ([http://www.michaelfullan.ca/articles\\_2008.htm](http://www.michaelfullan.ca/articles_2008.htm)) claims that 'personalization (by which he means meeting the needs of every learner), precision (by which he means getting the details of management right) and professional learning' are the prerequisites for successful schools. He cites 'Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Building Professional Learning Communities' (2006 R Dufour, R Dufour, B Eaker and T Many) as suggesting six core elements for creating professional learning communities:

- A focus on learning
- A collaborative culture with a focus on learning
- Collective enquiry into best practice
- An action orientation
- A commitment to continuous improvement
- A focus on results

Michael Fullan also means by phrases like 'a collaborative culture' and 'collective enquiry' collaboration and collective action that goes beyond the boundaries of single organisations. An encouraging consequence of the focus on professional learning communities of the College Y programme is that some participants visited other organisations as part of their research.

A clearly articulated theoretical and practical focus on professional learning communities is an important ingredient of leadership programme. 'Building relationships' both within and beyond an organisation is an important part of leadership. It also challenges the individualism inherent in coaching and would undermine the 'tribes and cliques' identified by Cox and Smith (2004:32) as obstacles to the spreading of effective practice.

It became clear at College Y then that accreditation, university partnership, the development of professional learning communities and an open selection process were all

ingredients of a successful leadership programme. My work in the borough with aspiring middle and senior leaders also suggested that leadership programmes needed to give participants a sense of whether or not they had the skills for promotion through role playing real situations such as difficult conversations with subordinates. Participants in the leadership programmes at college X or Y were not confronted by such challenging scenarios.

However effective the individual elements of a programme are it was clear from college X that leadership programmes need to take place in an appropriately, ‘collegiate’ organisational culture. In ‘From Little Acorns: towards a strategy for spreading good practice within colleges (2004 Cox and Smith: 34) it is made clear that ‘organisational levers have the potential.....of making any development project greater than the sum of its parts’. The appropriate organisational structure and values are the appropriate ‘levers’.

College Y calls itself a learning organisation and it seems in the experience of this case study to provide the most appropriate ‘organisational levers’. The characteristics of collegiality can be supplemented by the following list of elements from Hitt (1995) quoted in ‘Developing a Learning Organisation Du Plessis, Du Plessis and Millett’: (Journal of Management Practice, volume 2 No4, 1999)) in which traditional organisations are contrasted with learning organisations.

Element	Traditional organisation	Learning organisation
Shared values	Efficiency Effectiveness	Excellence Organisational renewal
Management style	Control	Facilitator Coach
Strategy, Action plan	Top down approach Road map	Everyone is consulted Learning Map
Structure	Hierarchy	Flat structure Dynamic networks
Staff Characteristics	People who know (experts) Knowledge is power	People who learn Mistakes tolerated as part of learning
Distinctive Staff Skills	Adaptive learning	Generative learning
Measurement system	Financial measures	Financial and non- financial
Teams	Working groups Departmental boundaries	Cross functional teams

**Table 7:** Hitt’s distinction between traditional and learning organisations

This model is taken from a non-educational, organisational setting and while financial health is important for sixth form colleges, the measurement system section is the only element that doesn’t really apply. However it would be possible to replace ‘financial measures, with students’ exam results.

The concept of learning organisation also implies transformative as opposed to transactional models of leadership. Bush and Middlewood (2011:11) quote Miller and Miller's (2001:182) distinction between the two approaches:

'Transactional leadership is leadership in which relationships with teachers are based upon an exchange for some valued resource. To the teacher, interaction between administrators and teachers is usually episodic, short-lived and limited to the exchange transaction. Transformational leadership is more potent and complex and occurs when one or more teachers engage with others in such a way that administrators and teachers raise one another to higher levels of commitment and dedication, motivation and morality. Through the transforming process, the motives of the leader and follower merge'

It should be clear that being a learning organisation and transformational leadership are difficult to achieve in reality. College Y, for example, does not have a flat structure and departmental boundaries are still significantly in place. Gleeson and Knights (2007: 50) also point out that 'fashionable notions of distributed and transformative leadership may simply mask a 'progressive' reworking of neo-liberal reform.' and it is never possible to have an organisation in which no pockets of contradictory practice exist. They also suggest there are contradictions in espousing a model of distributive leadership while acting out the role of the 'heroic leader'. The sacrifice of time, family and other interests in the leader, even in a learning organisation, may be what dissuades staff from aspiring to leadership.

It nevertheless remains the case that the most successful organisational change and focus on leadership I have experienced has been at College Y. By adopting an approach focused on learning, in which everyone is consulted and by pursuing its own values independently of the expectations of external organisations it has managed to resolve the tension between its needs and the wider context and satisfy those very external organisations such as Ofsted and Investors in People, for which it now has a gold award.

That there is occasional conflict between rhetoric and practice in would be learning organisations, that pockets of traditional practice exist and that the 'working of power may be being masked' just means that the opportunity for organisational analysis that a leadership programme represents is all the more important. Staff need to be educated to be alert and suspicious but constructive. David Collinson (2006: 184) quotes Chaleff (2003) about the importance of resistance in organisations.

'Observing that 'honest feedback' from followers to leaders is frequently absent in organisations, he suggests that close followers need to be more "courageous" to voice constructive criticism.....Chaleff recommends that courageous followers should challenge leaders views and decisions (whilst also displaying integrity, responsibility and service).'

Collinson goes on to argue that Chaleff underestimates the possible negative consequences of resistance. There should not be negative consequences if resistance is

informed and constructive. So the final lesson of this case study is that organisations can never be the ideal that they aspire to, and that they and leadership programmes require constructive challenge to be effective. After all McNiff (2005) is quoted in chapter 2 suggesting that participants in action learning must distinguish ‘their first-hand engagement with authentic lived reality and first-hand engagement with lived experience of constructed reality’. This is true of participants in action learning but also of all staff in an organisation.

## **Conclusion**

That this is the ‘analytic periphery of this case study does not mean that my learning is complete. The very increase in theoretical sensitivity that participating in a series of action learning cycles on the development of leadership of change in inner-city sixth form colleges gives me, means that I am constantly aware of the complexity of leadership, of organisations and of programmes designed to focus on leadership development.

I also continue to be aware of a range of tensions that exist between politically driven practice and the neo-liberal context in which that practice operates. If progressive models of leadership are ultimately ‘masking’ a more sophisticated way of pursuing the instrumentalist, neo-liberal standards agenda then is it actually possible to satisfy the appetite for league tables and Ofsted and the genuine needs of inner—London students. Is resistance rather than the resolution of opposites the preferable path? If resistance isn’t possible then resolving these tensions for the sake of students is the moral task of leadership and makes leadership worthwhile pursuing.

I am in the meantime regularly driven to new theoretical material that changes or broadens my understanding. I am in some senses frustrated that this work has suggested a series of more theoretical investigations that cannot be accommodated in a sufficiently profound way within work-based learning. These would include further reading and study of:

- Contemporary analysis of the tension between determinism and agency
- Critical analysis and history of the use of the term ‘leadership’ in the public services and elsewhere
- The assumptions underpinning constructivist psychology and the continuing popularity of coaching
- The use of reflection in professional development

In some senses this understanding that analysis like this is by definition incomplete and that greater understanding generates questions more than answers is indicative of the learning about leadership programmes and leadership that I have developed since 2004.

## CHAPTER10 FINDINGS

### Introduction

Although I am more aware than ever of the complexity of establishing successful leadership programmes, it is now possible to suggest tentative answers to the key research questions I set out to answer.

1. What would a leadership programme in inner-London sixth form colleges need to achieve to be successful?
2. What would be the ingredients for a successful leadership of change programme in College X and other widening participation inner-London sixth form Colleges such as College Y

It is stated at the very beginning of this work that there is an assumption that leadership programme are necessary and that they need to be internally driven. In the spirit of 'considering alternative perspectives' it is worth reconsidering these assumptions before answering the research questions

Prior to incorporation and the new accountability culture that it initiated, the leaders of the sector just emerged naturally and were not necessarily any less gifted than the generation of leaders, currently in power and trained in leadership. Also at College X, once the principal who sponsored the original leadership programme had left there has been no attempt to prepare for succession or train future leaders. It is therefore by no means a generally shared assumption that leadership training is necessary.

It has to be said, however, that at that college the only two people promoted since 2004 did the second leadership programme and one of these has exploited opportunities for shadowing, training and mentoring offered by the Network of Black professionals. Also in a very recent restructuring no internal appointment was made to take up posts of increased responsibility. It may have been the case that leadership training would have prepared internal candidates for appointment to these roles. I will assume therefore that it is better to run leadership training than not do so.

It is still possible to feel that leadership programme run by organisations such as LSIS would have had more impact. Such programme would lose the local focus and context of local leadership programme and would have less impact on the whole organisation. Also an opportunity would be missed to develop future leaders who could benefit from contributing to an internally run programme as the coaches and I did on the first leadership programme. John Adair, responsible for leadership strategy at the United Nations believes that ownership of leadership programme is essential (Why does leadership training fail. <http://trainingzone.co.uk> 2008).

‘You should always keep control of your leadership development programme. You may get help and advice on it but never hand it over’

I will therefore assume that sixth form colleges would benefit from leadership programme and that the most effective kind of leadership programme should be internally run.

### **What a leadership programme needs to achieve to be successful**

Initially there needs to be a clear articulation of the purpose of any leadership programme. The purpose of the first leadership programme in this case study was experimental but it was to prepare for succession, to promote the academic strategy and to promote leadership behaviour around the 4 Cs (consistency, capacity building, conversation and climate change). It soon became clear from subsequent experiences that to be successful leadership programmes needed further ambitions. In order to make people’s investment in time and organisational investment worthwhile they should:

- Have a positive impact on the college in which it is situated, including changing the way staff collaborate with each other. Ultimately leadership programmes in conjunction with other elements of organisational innovation must improve the student experience by contributing to improvement in staff practice.
- Provide participants with analytical and practical tools that will make their tacit understanding explicit, develop the sophistication of their interaction with each other and prepare them for leadership
- It should help participants understand the demands and opportunities of leadership and whether or not they want that kind of role for themselves in the future through providing practical engagement with leadership.
- Create a layer of staff who understand key issues and are ready for succession

Each of these general goals can be broken down into more specific achievements of a successful leadership programme as indicated in the table below.

Goal	Specific achievements
Positive impact on college	Increased collaboration, ‘dynamic networks’, cross functional teams, professional learning communities, a research ethos and generative learning Distributed leadership and a coaching approach underpinned by a shared set of values and ‘broad aims’ for education
Analytical and practical tools which	Greater awareness of ways of

make explicit tacit knowledge	understanding organisations and management such as the distinction between management and leadership. Practical skills of coaching, mentoring and having difficult conversations. Ability to understand contradictions between rhetoric and practice and courage for constructive resistance
Demands and opportunities of leadership	Participants understand that leadership is morally driven and 'enabling' but at the same time are clear how hard it is to initiate change and role play some challenges of leadership
Succession	Increased confidence and desire for promotion or understanding that leadership is not for the participants. Ultimately participants will get either internal or external promotion or have a better understanding of career goals.

**Table 8:** goals of internal leadership programmes

It is possible that a single leadership programme cannot achieve all the above goals. College Y has chosen to have two separate programmes: one action learning theoretical programme focused on an improvement project and one practical programme focused on the challenges of leadership at College Y.

The ingredients of a successful programme that follow may also have to be integrated into a two phase approach to leadership development: an action learning cycle and a practical programme in which leadership situations are role played by participants.

### **Ingredients of a successful programme**

- Leadership programme will be more effective if they are in harmony with existing organisation culture and practice. Some work on that culture and practice, so that appropriate collegiality and transformative leadership approaches exist needs doing prior to embarking on leadership development, so that tribal cultures are already challenged
- Leadership and therefore any programme preparing for it should be informed by a moral vision or purpose. In the language of the first leadership programme it is this vision or 'light' that aligns organisational practice. The vision for Inner-London Colleges ought to be based on exploring the tension between meeting data targets and a broader view of education, which acknowledges but resists neo-

liberal instrumentalist discourses and in inner-London uses the rich resources of the city to create opportunities for its young people.

- Leadership programme need to market and share their activity with the rest of the organisation, especially the senior management team if it is not directly involved with the programme
- The most effective leadership programmes are internally run but are the result of partnership with an accrediting body such as a university, where that relationship is supportive rather than directive. Universities also gain from this relationship
- Participants in an accredited internal programme require both academic support and coaching They need guidance in reflection and in applying the theoretical tools they are being given to their work based projects
- Time needs to be created for innovative practice and participants do not mind regular sacrifice of free time if there is sufficient reward and motivation. It is nevertheless worthwhile running such programme every two years to avoid over burdening organisations or alternating accredited action learning cycles with practical input.
- Action learning, clearly understood is the best model for internal improvement programmes, integrating as it does theory with practice. It is also non-hierarchical which allows for a broad range of participants.

There are however potential problems with the action learning cycle. Experience suggests that slavish adherence to the Kolb Cycle is unnecessary and that clarity about action learning is important to avoid research into the action of others rather than research into one's own actions which is the real basis of action learning.

To understand leadership and management theory participants in leadership programme need to be engaged in leadership and management practice, through the project which is at the centre of their work. Aristotle was right over two thousand years ago when he suggested that virtue could not be taught. He suggested that one became good by doing good acts. Similarly one becomes a leader by engaging in and reflecting on leadership.

This is not to underestimate the kind of practical programmes that for example took place for aspiring secondary leaders in the borough which lasted for a day but focused on the practical skills of leadership.

- The projects which are the focus of action research should be informed by the strategic vision of the organisation and ultimately inform its further strategic development. It is also the projects that give programmes an essential local focus. In Inner-London post 16 education projects also need to engage with the challenges of that particular context. At the same time programmes and the



organisational culture in which they are located need to engage with the changing wider educational context both to anticipate change and successfully resist overly instrumentalist neoliberal educational discourses.

- Investigating leadership and practice can take participants out of their comfort zones and require them to reflect in ways to which they are not used, so coaching is a useful supportive tool. Coaching is also a useful methodology for future leaders to possess as it replaces more traditional, more masculine, authoritarian methods for dealing with colleagues. This practice like other manifestations of modern leadership practice however can mask the operation of power

To balance the therapy derived, individualistic dangers inherent in coaching and constructivist methodology and to highlight the genuinely collaborative nature of successful change, an academic and practical focus on collaborative learning and professional learning communities is helpful

- If the focus of leadership in post 16 education is academic change, the andragogy (methodology for teaching adults) of the leadership programme should mirror the innovative and effective practice expected of teachers at the institution in the classroom. Also just as students should be able to contribute to the design of their learning experiences, some content and activity should be designed by participants as was requested by participants in the second leadership programme.
- Given the plethora of leadership thinkers and strategies that there are it would seem almost impossible to choose appropriate leadership and management theoretical content. On the basis of experience the content of the college X programmes would seem to provide participants with appropriate conceptual, analytical and practical tools to prepare them for leadership. The following ideas helped participants develop their understanding:

- The nature of organisational cultures
- The link between leadership and vision
- Distinction between leadership and management
- Power, authority and role
- Professional learning communities
- Delegation and empowerment
- Time and innovation
- The nature of action research
- The methodology of coaching

A more in depth framework for understanding models of leadership, focused on transformational leadership would place leadership programmes in a clearer framework and it is worth remembering that other content may also have been effective. Matthew Stewart has suggested that a programme focused on

humanities based disciplines would work. What matters, however, is that people are collaboratively focused on change and that the content of a leadership programme, whatever it might be, helps them make explicit what has been tacit and interpret their daily working experience for the benefit of students and colleagues.

## Conclusion

Having attempted to answer the research questions asked by this case study and identified as far as possible the outcomes and ingredients with respect to organisation, methodology and content of successful programmes there is a final question that needs answering. How applicable are the findings of this case study to other organisations within inner-London and even elsewhere?

All or parts of the ingredients of successful leadership development programmes identified as a result of this action learning case study would seem to be useful to any organisation. If I am ever promoted again, I would attempt to persuade my new colleagues to implement a programme modeled on the above ingredients wherever my new employer was located and whatever the nature of the students.

It is in the choice of project that the local focus is created and I remain as convinced as ever that the students of inner-London require the best leadership and the best teaching and learning. This is true at a time when it has become increasingly difficult for them to map a future. Access to university is more expensive and difficult to achieve and employment or apprentice options are not clearly available. Inner-city colleges require skilled leadership to resolve the tension between exam success and a broader vision of education and to prepare young people for their future. In a debate published in the Observer (How do we make our schools fit to face the 21<sup>st</sup> century? 04/09/11) five educationalists the following characteristics young people should have:

- Open-mindedness, and inquisitiveness
- Knowing that that they don't know everything but knowing how to find it
- Informed curiosity
- The ability to think
- Adaptability

To allow inner-London students to pass exams at a sufficient level at the same time as developing these assets requires imaginative and purposeful leadership which in turn allows for imagination and experimentation in the classroom. Such leadership needs to be informed by appropriate continuing professional development based on the ingredients described here.

## **CHAPTER 11 SOME PERSONAL REFLECTIONS AND THE SUMMER OF 2011**

Although I have reached the ‘analytic periphery’ of this case study it remains impossible to conclude. Events occur that make me review my perspectives and I read analytical works that deepen my understanding. I have a sense that I have left things out, which is of course inevitable.

Leadership in education is leadership of academic change and retrospectively it feels that the nature of academic change that is required in inner-London has been inadequately articulated. In ‘Education for All: The Future of Education and Training for 14-19 year olds’ (Pring, Hayward, Hodgson, Johnson, Keep, Oancea, Rees and Wilde 2009: 10-11) a broader vision that should inform the leadership of state education is offered. According to these writers education should have:

### **‘Broader aims**

The aims of education – namely, the initiation into a worthwhile form of life which is distinctively human – should embrace a wider set of achievements and understanding of personal and social development than those which are covered in the targets, performance indicators and assessments that dominate policy and practice.

### **Values not targets**

Neither the aims and values, nor their embodiment in educationally worthwhile programme of learning, can be captured in the target culture of modern ‘performance management’.

### **More active and practical learning**

Attention should be given to more active and practical modes of learning as part of the general education for everyone, whether in school-, college- or work-based learning.

### **Teacher as curriculum developer**

The central importance of the teacher as creator rather than deliverer of the curriculum needs to be recognised, affecting the control and organisation of professional development.

### **Increased collaboration**

Attainment of the educational aims and of improved standards requires a vigorous development of the collaborative arrangements between providers of education and training – formal and informal. Few providers can go it alone.

### **A move from controlling to enabling**

The relatively recent appropriation by the state of control over the details of education and training has brought its own problems. The relationship between central control and local responsibility needs close examination. There should be a shift from a controlling

state to an enabling one. England might learn from the more consultative processes in Wales.

### **Acceptance that schools cannot do it all**

As Basil Bernstein (1970) once argued, “education cannot compensate for society”. Too much is expected of schools and colleges. Their apparent inefficacy is in part due, not to their own inadequate efforts, but to wider and often pernicious social influences outside the formal educational and training system. ‘

The focus on collaboration, values, active learning, creating your own curriculum and an understanding of the wider political and social context that colleges cannot control on their own are the values that have emerged from this case study and should inform the leadership of inner-London colleges.

Leadership programmes are not necessarily about their theoretical content but are about the collective effort to define ‘virtue’ for the organisation in which one works and then applying it in practice. It is now seven years since I began to reflect on leadership generically, on leadership for academic change in inner-London Further Education and on the most effective ways of improving organisations through a focus on leadership training. My own understanding and practice have significantly benefited from this process of reflection.

Participation in these leadership programme has given me theoretical tools to understand organisations better and the practical skills and confidence to mentor and coach others. Not only do I feel better prepared for increased leadership but I can now work with younger colleagues to help them develop confidence and understand the importance of leadership.

Some teachers are in fact negative about leadership and feel that the only real way to effect change and work towards the increase in social mobility that the United Kingdom so clearly needs is in the classroom and through direct contact with students. For a while at the beginning of my career I was tempted by this point of view. I now, however, fully understand the moral seriousness of being a leader in post-16 education. Only senior leaders are in a position to find an appropriate balance between satisfying the appetites of an increasingly market driven system while having the imagination and drive to develop a strategy and a curriculum which is value-driven, responds to local needs and creates space for resistance and to meet the needs of inner-London young people.

After the banking crisis that began in 2008 and before his death from a degenerative illness in 2010 the historian Tony Judt published a book called ‘Ill Fares the Land’ (2010) aimed at giving young people the tools to diagnose and respond to what he believed was a contemporary Western democratic malaise. He begins the introduction, subtitled ‘A Guide for the Perplexed’ with the following words:

‘Something is profoundly wrong with the way we live today. For thirty years we have made a virtue out of the pursuit of material self-interest: indeed, this very pursuit now constitutes whatever remains of our collective sense of purpose. We know what things

cost but have no idea what things are worth. We no longer ask of a judicial ruling or a legislative act: is it good? Is it fair? Is it just? Is it right? Will it help bring about a better society or a better world? Those used to be the political questions, even if they invited no easy answers. We must learn again to pose them'

Another historian, Eric Hobsbawm, in an article published in the Guardian 'Socialism has failed. Now capitalism is bankrupt. So what comes next? 10/04/09) saw the financial crisis and the urgency of the environmental threat as an opportunity to respond the ills that Judt describes in 'a major shift away from the free market and towards public action'. Hobsbawm was not necessarily being optimistic as he feels that 'we underestimate how addicted governments and decision makers are to the free-market snorts that have made them feel so good for decades'.

Hobsbawm was right to be pessimistic. The materialistic greed of the banking system responsible for the financial crisis goes largely unpunished, the coalition's education policy is modelled perhaps more than ever on free market thinking and the urban disaffected young have rioted all over the UK and have smashed windows in search of laptops, trainers and clothes as if in the absence of 'public action', it were true that 'the pursuit of material interest' gave them their only 'collective sense of purpose'.

Harry Eyres in an article in the Financial Times (When words fail us all 19/08/11) while acknowledging the genuine problem of increased social deprivation, provoked by successive governments, suggests that the violence in search of material gain is a consequence of a peculiarly English inarticulateness: a failure to find in this case the right words to express legitimate anger. Eyres goes on to say that to inadequately describe their acts as 'criminality' as the Prime Minister has done, shows that there is a problem with articulateness at all levels of English society.

Having worked with young people in inner-London for 23 years I am wary of the claim that the young people that rioted are inarticulate. The young people I have worked with have an inventive if not traditional command of language often witnessed in urban music. The real problem is the sense of frustration emerging from social deprivation, increasing inequality of wealth and the absence of a discernible future.

It is nevertheless sad that this frustration is expressed in material self-interest. It is easy to understand the attraction of theologically conservative versions of Islam and Christianity for young people in search of an alternative sense of purpose. More than ever inner-city education has a dual purpose. It must improve exam performance and reduce as far as possible inequality, but it should also provide young people with a secular language of values and purpose, which is a genuine alternative to the pursuit of material possession and to conservative religious practice.

In spite of Hobsbawm's pessimism, leaders in inner-London further education cannot afford to be pessimistic. According to MacIntyre (1981. 5) in a different context 'if we are indeed in as bad a state as I take us to be, pessimism too will be one more cultural luxury that we shall have to dispense with in order to survive in these hard times.'

Inner -London students require the best possible leaders who fully understand the seriousness of the challenges that faces them and believe they can make a difference. To prepare these leaders of the future is a task worth pursuing.

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## Appendix 1

### Examples of data sources

Input	Reflection
Direction and the need to revisit periodically	We are trying to define the direction('the light') and need to think carefully about it before we try to share this with our teams. Could be that our vision won't be universally shared-how do we combat this?
Task-based and environment-based skills.	Useful to put a name to the various things we do. Teaching should be a mixture of these as should good leadership. Difficult for those in middle management to aspire too much to the areas of risk-taking and independence, when initiatives are blocked from above because they are seen to be outside our remit, even if we perceive them to have direct relevance to the academic strategy. Similarly, fostering these skills within teams is difficult as creativity and risk-taking is very often seen to be a luxury which is precluded by pressure of time. Engagement of staff is key and I would like to investigate ways forward.
Criteria for leaders	In an educational environment, subject expertise and experience are key. However, have middle managers traditionally concentrated on task-based aspects because that was the nature of the job? Moving to a more active leadership role isn't necessarily easy.
Environment we work in	Hugely pressurised and has led in the past to a lack of will /ability to institute change. How can leaders influence this?

## Reflective essay 2

Input	Reflection
'Umbrella' theory	<p>Directly applicable to middle management situation. We field issues coming down from Senior Management and try to deflect many of them from the team so that they can perform, but often feel that there is no umbrella for us. There is often no support for us and tasks seem to be imposed without thinking of the impact on our day-to-day experience, which includes maintaining a high standard of classroom teaching. This is often the first thing to suffer when the pressure is on. We need to think carefully about how middle managers can best be enabled to show good leadership.</p> <p>Working across two cultures is also quite difficult as far as relationships are concerned; one is expected to be part of the team and still take a judgemental/disciplinary role.</p>
Effective inter-personal relationships.	<p>This is so often a stumbling block. It is so important to listen, to feel that one has support and can ask for help. In my experience, these skills are missing in many leaders, who often treat staff as complainers for voicing concerns about workload or problems. I would personally like to develop these skills, to have the time to discuss and negotiate so that morale is improved.</p>

What Have I Done?	Reflection	Changes	Role of theoretical input in this process
<p>Action Learning set: Individual project - Promoting the 4 C's.. Questions: Why did you choose this project</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Does your project involve all staff</li> <li>2. Do the 4 c's identify the light?</li> <li>3. Who can support you in the process</li> <li>4. How optimistic are you about success in your project?</li> <li>5. What issues will remain if you are successful in your project and how will these be resolved?</li> <li>6. What would success look like and how will you measure it?</li> <li>7. How will you ensure you don't do it all yourself</li> <li>8. How are you going to get constructive conversation going and maintain it?</li> </ol>	<p>In 'check in' Openness and focus fairly high, energy levels low.</p> <p>I thought the questions I posed would enable the individual to focus in on turning identified issues into actions to address them and upon reflection, this seems to have worked</p>	<p>Individual chose: 7, 8, 6,</p> <p>Outcome: took these q's to next team meeting and these were the focus. Reported positive responses in successful distribution of responsibilities within team. Individual expressed gratification and surprise at progress.</p>	<p>ALS model and questioning techniques from input session enabled purposeful session.</p>
<p>Coaching input session</p> <p>Models discussed: ' - Coaching for performance'</p> <p>Explored questions which generate observational thinking. Not 'how' and 'why' questions - away from the analytical.</p> <p>Reflecting Back (word for word)</p> <p>Paraphrasing ('I think what I'm hearing is')</p> <p>Clarifying what words mean to the individual.</p> <p>Summarising; silence.</p> <p>Reflective essays discussed - these need to reflect the Kolb cycle.</p>	<p>I realise that the experience I have as a coachee will help me greatly but I need to experiment and find my own coaching style by experimentation and then further reflection and cycles.</p>	<p>Clarification of what I still need to do to develop my own coaching style and the balance between my own action learning and external input on coaching models</p>	<p>Coaching models to provide initial scaffolding of activity and experimentation.</p>



What Have I Done?	Reflection	Changes	Role of theoretical input in this process
<p>Consolidation session</p> <p>Recap of organisation culture questionnaire exercise (Harrison)</p> <p>The Light and Umbrella</p> <p>Learning Theories: Kolb, Transition Curve, Personal Construct Psychology</p> <p>Performance Model – Behaviour</p> <p>Criteria, tasks and outcome</p> <p>Action Learning</p> <p>Leadership model to be developed (primary) via Kolb.</p> <p>The value of coaching is seriously diminished unless the coachee has done something. The reflections should be around how the theoretical input has allowed the individual to experiment and then DO something.</p> <p>The reflection BEFORE coaching should trigger ‘learning about learning’; reflection should continue after coaching and inform the ‘essay’</p>	<p>What have we done so far, what have we learnt, what is the culture, what do we want it to be, and how are the theories relevant to the task of moving it on?</p> <p>What would the actual behaviour be? It will require determination, courage, effective delegation, distributive leadership.</p> <p>This means to me:</p> <p>Letting go of control - Coaching will help build confidence and foster autonomy. Mentoring could advise and support; lead by example.</p> <p>Negotiation is getting what you want and the other person/people get it too.</p> <p>Compromise; winning over; Acceptance of (apparent) compromise, both parties.</p> <p>Problem solving, conclusions leading to actions</p>	<p>I have delegated a large area of responsibility to a member of my team</p>	<p>Although initially difficult to grasp, I now see the practical application of these theories, in particular Kolb on which this reflection is based</p>
<p>Personal (individual) coaching session</p> <p>More input on my role in the programme.</p> <p>Discussed my grasp of the understanding of the connection between my current role(s), development needs and responsibilities, and the LDP</p>	<p>I had a partial grasp – experienced some difficulty in seeing how it could support me in the present due to my overly task-focused approach.</p> <p>My development needs are not so much technical but are in the area of leadership skill. Measuring myself</p>	<p>I am more self aware that I am in a state of unconscious incompetence. I am at the top of my game but now realise I am entering a new league. I currently</p>	<p>Being able to put a name to something – PCP</p> <p>The model (High Impact) helped me to identify some initial development needs.</p>

What Have I Done?	Reflection	Changes	Role of theoretical input in this process
	<p>against a leadership model: (High Impact)</p> <p>Leadership Capabilities – I have Focused drive, Emotional Intelligence, Trusted Influence. I need to work on my conceptual and systems thinking.</p> <p>Leadership Responsibilities: I can create a vision and an organisation, I have influence/knowledge, I can motivate my team. I would like to produce better results.</p> <p>Leadership Skills: I need to develop my change management skills and identify what these are and strategies for deployment. I can coach and mentor well. I can communicate, negotiate and solve problems.</p> <p>This raises the question about my effectiveness as a change agent</p> <p>What skills strategies and techniques do I need to develop to help people shift from task to leadership? I have to find ways to overcome resistance in the coaching sessions – how resistant to</p>	<p>only have a partial grasp of what skills and competences I need for my future development and the future which I can't do now. I have started to develop a process to enable the other individuals on the programme to do the same. I now have a model to help them with the process of self evaluation.</p> <p>I now see the personal relevance of the programme. My coaching is going to focus on capturing the learning from the action learning cycles around my experimentation with coaching models and the identification of my preferred style. They will also enable me to keep the programme alive and relevant between input and ALS sessions</p>	<p>I need more input on change management techniques which I need to find myself. I need to explore more sources on coaching approaches and more importantly, I need to try them out in the context of a Kolb cycle.</p> <p>Action learning is about the supporting project, the coaching is more about the person trying to progress it.</p>

What Have I Done?	Reflection	Changes	Role of theoretical input in this process
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	change am I?	I realise that the biggest challenge is to assist individuals in moving away from 'task' to leadership.	
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— 'safe experimentation with interaction between sets'   
 input and project in a time learning and learning   
 development of focus in department.

AFG

## Leadership programme 05-06

*This is an action research programme designed to develop your leadership capacity with a focus on the college and the inner-London context.*

### A. Time Commitment

#### 1. Induction

Thursday October 20. 5pm - 8pm. College  
Friday October 21. 10am - 4pm. Middlesex University

2. **Input sessions.** There will be 5 sessions delivered by Professor Mike van Oudsthoorn of the I-coach academy, which is based at Middlesex University. **There will be one session a half term between 5pm and 7pm in the HE centre at the college.**

#### 3. Action Learning sets. (groups of 3 with a facilitator)

One 1-hour session in between the input sessions either 5pm to 6pm or other convenient time

#### 4. Reflective writing

A reflective template to be completed in between sessions.

### B. Content.

#### 1. Induction

- Presentation from last year's participants
- Questionnaire to identify nature of college
- The 4 Cs
- Coaching
- Action Research and the Kolb Cycle
- Action Learning sets
- Institutional Change

2. **Input** (this is only suggested as different input can be generated by the group)

- Managing versus leading
- The Bennis model of leadership
- Delegation or empowerment
- Compliance/innovation (preserving or improving institutions)
- How to create time/obstacles to change.

### C. Statement of motivation for participation.

How might you benefit from taking part in the programme?

The programme offers an opportunity to reflect on the new role I find myself in with its ambiguous potential for "leadership." I would be interested in defining the meaning of "leadership" and its value for my own purposes at work.

How might the college benefit from your participation?

A colleague with a clearer understanding of role breadth and viability would benefit the college. Cross-college issues which cut across (against) departmental boundaries and which are becoming increasingly pressing require colleagues with wider and more inclusive views and understanding.

During the programme we will need to apply the input we receive to an aspect of our work. E.g. changing teaching and learning, introducing curriculum change, empowering colleagues to take initiative, developing a coaching model in department or team.

**What might your focus be?**

Focus on transitional issues 14-19?

Development of skills in language across departments?

Development of holistic approaches to student development?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date 5-10-05

2 ✓✓✓

## Leadership programme

### Reflection

What have I done?	Reflection	Changes	Role of theoretical input sessions in process
<p>--- Question 1 "Data": Explore different types of databases available in the college. <i>An appointment was made with college registrar on 23 Jan</i></p> <p>Drafted three main types of data required for department (See attached handout)</p> <p>Question 2 "Changes in underachieving students": Made a list of factors</p> <p>Question 3 "Staff change" Considered staff (str./ weakness) behaviour on student achievement</p>	<p>Considered a number of approaches (e.g. matching SGM DB against department needs: does database provide relevant, valid information)</p> <p>Considered issues such as staff updating database at certain times of the year; how can everyone access details (Solution- online database)</p> <p>List is concrete experimentation. Need to compare. Use another database to do background 'theory' research. Read article 'Life satisfaction and student performance' (See handout)</p> <p>Staff not keen on this issue- demotivated. Therefore I will not pursue this any further</p>	<p>To further investigate deep issues, I went to KH's working group party on 25 January to find out implications of gaining appropriate data (Monitoring and Review through tutorial)</p> <p>To design online template where staff members can input data. This will be consistent with other level 3 model. Strict deadlines will be implemented</p> <p>Focus group based on weak/ average A2 students and compared their attitudes between subjects: rate their motivation</p> <p>None</p>	<p>Decided to overcome new MIS system obstacles (Leadership and management); Time and Innovation: Further research by asking staff members of relevant student information required. Compared with SGM database- all information not available and new database- lot of problems. Therefore decided to be innovative and create my own database.</p> <p>DELEGATION: It is best for me to monitor overall student progress while team members keep updating records. MANAGEMENT SKILLS: Planning and organising whole template</p> <p>Considered 'Organisational culture and Institutional change'. Difference between college and student needs</p> <p>Need to look at other theories not yet covered. Need to look at college culture and climate of staff feeling and its affect on project.</p>

## LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME

1. Which theoretical input from Mike was useful and why? (e.g. individual change, difference between leadership/management, work place culture analysis etc)

We had about five theoretical sessions from Mike based on variety of concepts such as Delegation, Empowerment, Management, Compliance, Innovation, Models of leadership. I found models of leadership (Bennis model) very useful as it helped me to understand things better as a co-ordinator. The session on 'Management versus leadership' was beneficial as it allowed me to assess skills to understand whether I am a leader or manager.

2. Were action learning sets useful ( I recognise that these were difficult to organise)?

Action learning sets were based on learning style questionnaire. This was beneficial as group members consisted of distinct personalities. I was put together with 'X' and 'Y', however 'X's soon left the programme and therefore I did not work with her. I had two meetings with 'Y' coached by 'Z'. I found coaching extremely useful as it enabled me to unlock potential to maximise performance. It made me feel very competent and more fulfilled in contribution. Action learning set also allowed me to decide a suitable project title and helped me to get started by breaking down theme in three different questions.

3. How would you improve a future programme?

- Effective Action Learning set
- Participants to decide 40% topics for discussion
- Balance of theory and practical exercises in each session

4. Was your original project successful in any way?

My project title was 'Improving motivation and behaviour of underachieving students on A-level programme'. Initially it was successful due to ALS as it helped me to focus and gather relevant data. Reflection template was useful in tracking changes and concrete doing. Although project was partially completed, it was not successful due to lack of coaching and obtaining data which was time-consuming.

5. Is there any influence from the programme on your work at the moment?

Leadership programme has an influence on work as it enabled me to reconsider my leadership style and adapt to different personalities as I work with seven staff members. Also project enabled me to concentrate on regular tracking and monitoring and understand student behaviour.

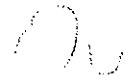
6. Should the college be running an internal leadership programme and why?

Yes, I believe college should be running leadership programme due to following reasons:

- To make life better for students and focus on their success through completion of project
- Coaching sessions enable colleagues to get together and share good/ bad practise as well as learn how to deal with conflicting personalities
- A combination of theory which is constantly applied to teaching and relevant staff
- Internal programme focus on change in the organisation



## LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME CERTIFICATION



### **1. Which theoretical input from Mike was useful and why? (E.g. individual change, difference between leadership/management, work place culture analysis etc)**

I found two theoretical models particularly useful because of their immediate relevance to my day to day practice. These were around delegation & empowerment and the Bennis Model of leadership.

As the BTEC level one coordinator I had often struggled with determining clear healthy boundaries around distribution of day to day tasks. I often felt uncomfortable in delegating certain aspects of the work load, thinking that as the coordinator I was responsible for undertaking these tasks. Job descriptions were not that finely tuned to determine precisely who does what. Following the input from Mike's session I had a better understanding of empowerment (concerning different aspects, different contexts, objective & subjective mismatch and empowerment not being absolute etc.) and was then able to view delegation and empowerment in a more positive light. This has helped considerably with how I manage daily tasks. I am now more confident in inviting the team into owning specific tasks.

The Bennis Model gave me insight into the potential overall main features of an effective leader. Bennis categorizes these features into 3 overlapping areas, Leadership Capabilities, Leadership Responsibilities and Leadership Skills. Focussing on this model I realized where I had gaps and fell short in some of these characteristics. An example of this is in the Leadership Skills of coaching and mentoring. Whilst I have successfully displayed these attributes in the past, I felt that with the time constraints and team dynamics I had not demonstrated this skill to the level that I would have liked during that time frame.

### **2. Were action learning sets useful (I recognise that these were difficult to organise)?**

Yes, I used the learning sets as a vehicle to reflect and gain feedback on my project. The area that I focused on here was team building. As a result of the learning sets I recognized the need to arrange and plan an Away Day programme for the BTEC Introductory team. My aim was to focus on personal and professional issues that needed to be addressed in order to enhance the effective delivery of the BTEC Introductory programme. Additionally a number of concerns had been identified. The underlying cause of these concerns served as obstacles and began to impact upon the flow of communication and effective running of the team. Areas of conflict within the team were expressed at the away Day and this led to '*clearing the air*' amongst staff. During the Learning Set meetings I was able to review my role in light of some of the concerns that were expressed. For example during taught sessions Mike had delivered theoretical input around management versus leadership. I was able to reflect on this during the learning set sessions and explore the contrast and suitability of these two in my role as BTEC Co coordinator. Further to this I was also able to draw on the 4 stages of development, forming, storming, norming and performing as outlined by Belbin.

### **3. How would you improve a future programme?**

Generally a good programme however I would have liked a greater variety of teaching/facilitating methods to be employed.

### **4. Was your original project successful in any way?**

Yes, please refer to point 2.

### **5. Is there any influence from the programme on your work at the moment?**

The influence on my work since attending both this programme and the First Steps to Leadership course delivered by the Centre for Excellence is as follows:

- Increased ease with creating an environment where team members take on ownership of tasks
- Greater confidence in delegating certain aspects of the work load
- A greater emphasis on developing a vision for the BTEC Introductory Programme through carrying out a more systematic detailed Year Planner
- Significantly improved working relations within the BTEC Intro team, which has led to more cohesive delivery of the programme.

**6. Should the college be running an internal leadership programme and why?**

Yes I think it would be a good idea to continue running a leadership programme for the following reasons:

- Learning sets can be used as an excellent vehicle to express concerns or challenges within a relatively 'safe' environment also to gain impartial feedback
- The theoretical input is beneficial when incorporated into everyday working practice
- Managing a course, programme or department is often very challenging, particularly around areas such as time management, team dynamics, leadership styles etc. Programmes such as this equip staff with the opportunity to reflect (possibly through the Kolb cycle) share experiences and gain feedback from colleagues. The outcome of this amounts to more effective and confident teacher/manager practitioners.

## Appendix 2

Power point introducing second leadership programme containing slide on ethics guaranteeing confidentiality, anonymity, the right not to participate etc.

## The Leadership Programme 2005/6

Ian Claussen

### The context for leadership

- Success for All
- Succession crisis in FE

### The focus of leadership at this college

#### Teaching and learning

1. The Inner London Context
2. The Academic Strategy

#### Academic Change

1. BTEC
2. Step up, Pathways to success, Fast Forward

### The 4Cs again

- Conversation
- Consistency
- Capacity building
- Climate change

### Last year's programme

- Experimental as one would expect from an Action research cycle
- My project
- This year's programme is therefore mark 2 and the fruit of reflection from the participants.
- Permanent revolution and the future

### Changes 1: Clarity

- Increased pre-programme information
- Placing the induction material in the context of the rest of the programme
- Understanding the action research cycle and the action learning set
- Having a clear project and motivation
- BUT we can generate changes

### Changes 2: Time and momentum

- Fewer sessions
  - Maintaining momentum
1. ALS (experimentation)
  2. Pursuing the project
  3. Reflective writing

### Issues

- Sharing with others (materials and outcomes)
- Using the techniques with others

### The schedule

- One session for each remaining half term
- 1 Intervening ALS
- No prescription about other meetings

### Logistical issues

- See me/E mail me for arrangements and requests
- Ask for clarification about the process
- Also refer to SL, ZT, DW and JM

### Ethics

- Confidentiality
- Anonymity
- Request that reflections are not used
- Professional doctorate at Middlesex University

### The future

- How does it continue for you?
- Certification
- HE accreditation through the National Centre for Work Based Learning

### Benefits

- Coaching, Action Learning Sets
- Working together/ in role
- Improving the experience of the college for staff
- Improving the experience of the college for the student