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**An Innovative Stakeholder Approach to Management Education:
A Case Study**

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**AN INNOVATIVE STAKEHOLDER
APPROACH TO MANAGEMENT EDUCATION:
A CASE STUDY**

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The purpose of this paper is to share with colleagues the learning and experience gained from a new and innovative type of management education programme. It is based on the outcomes from two case studies. This is very much an initial working paper as the evaluation of several of the programmes is ongoing as this paper is being written. The paper describes the experiences of organisations, participants, a university and a commercial provider of a collaborative management education programme and draws out the many advantages and disadvantages of such an approach. The paper finishes by indicating the future research that is ongoing in this area.

INTRODUCTION

Management education in the UK has been a major success story. Business schools as such originated in the United States with the establishment of Wharton in the late 1880s, followed by schools at Harvard in 1908 and MIT in 1925. They did not take off in the UK until the late 1940s with the establishment of schools such as Henley (1948), Bradford (1957), the London Business School and the Manchester Business School (1963). Since then, demand for management education has blossomed. There are now around 130 business schools in the UK that offer post-graduate, post-experience programmes leading to qualifications in management. In part, the demand has been fuelled by the periodic publication of reports that are critical of the state of British management. For example, Constable and McCormick's report, *The Making of British Managers*, and Handy's report, *The Making of Managers*, both published in 1987, criticised management development in British organisations and called for more and better provision of management education and training. Responses in terms of increased activity were forthcoming from both organisations and the growing number of corporate education providers. There have been criticisms from some quarters about the varying quality of some of the programmes that came about as a result of the increased demand (Watson, 2001). Some of the increases in organisational demand for management development have been noted in the literature. For example, Mangham and Silver (1986) suggested that around 50% of UK companies made no provision for management development. In 1997, this figure had dropped to 4% (Thomson, 1997). The number of days of management training has also increased, from 3.1 days per year as reported in the 1986 paper to 5.5 reported in the 1997 paper.

Management education in the UK has largely developed via university business schools. As a product of their locus in their academic homes, development of programmes has been largely along knowledge-based lines. Business school management qualifications usually have the status of degrees, or sub-degrees. The most typical of award-bearing programmes in the UK are the CMS (Certificate in Management Studies), the DMS (Diploma in Management Studies) and the MBA (Master of Business Administration). Because of their academic pedigrees, many of these programmes are conducted via traditional taught programmes, for example, as in the case of the MBA, the most prestigious of these

qualifications, where students attend classes at their institution or engage in distance (or "open") learning. Assessment tends to take place by way of formal examination, written assignments or a combination of both.

There has long been a debate as to the content of management education: should it be knowledge or competence-based? Few programmes have traditionally involved substantive learning via workplace activity beyond academic assignments based around the students' own organisations or a host organisation where students are not in employment at the same time as conducting their studies. Whilst the traditional approach has prevailed for many years, as Prince and Stewart (2000) observe, the ways in which management education is delivered in the future may be changing. Meister (1998) reports evidence from the United States that organisations are wanting to become more involved in collaborations with universities in order to engage in effective corporate management education. We have seen developments along these lines in the US and the UK with the growth of corporate universities (Walton, 1999). Stewart (1999) asserts that organisations are becoming more sophisticated in specifying their management education requirements. Prince and Stewart suggest that partnerships between organisations and business schools are increasing. Whilst they talk about a two-way partnership between organisation and business school, this paper suggests that there is another, possibly even more, powerful partnership model. Management education programmes that involve three-way partnerships between the organisation, the business school and an outside private provider add another dimension. This can bring a number of advantages to all parties and enhance the quality of the programme.

A STAKEHOLDER APPROACH

If, however, we adopt a stakeholder approach, another party enters the arena: the participant. There is increasing evidence that participants on management education programmes are becoming more sophisticated in their role and demands as "consumer", even when their programmes are sponsored by their employers. Stakeholder approaches imply expectations and responsibilities. In the context of management education, then, these relationships can be represented as a series of models. For the purpose illustrating these relationships, each stakeholder group has been given a name as follows:

The Provider: the party that designs, delivers and assesses the programme

The Commissioner: the party that ultimately bears the financial cost of the programme and has vested interests in its effectiveness

The Consumer: the party that goes through the programme itself

The Verifier: the party that assures the quality of the programme and makes the award.

Four major variants of management education can be identified, whilst of course there are others. Firstly, there is the scenario where the participant pays for his/her own course and attends an "open programme", for example a part-time MBA at a university. Secondly, there is the scenario where the participant is sponsored and attends an open programme. Thirdly, there is a style of management education where the organisation wishes to be involved in designing an in-house programme in conjunction with an academic provider. Lastly, there is the kind of programme

that forms the main focus of this paper, where a commercial provider enters into a partnership with an academic institution to design and deliver an in-house corporate programme. These variants of management education programmes can be represented as follows:

1. Self-funded/ Open Programme Model

In this model (figure 1), the main stakeholder groups are the university, who perform the roles of both provider and verifier, and the participant, who is both consumer and commissioner, as he/she is paying their own fees. As it is an open programme, there will be participants from several sectors and organisations, therefore organisational input will be small if indeed there is any at all.

2. Sponsored/ Open Programme Model

Here (figure 2), organisations as fee payers have a commissioning interest, but as this programme is open an organisation is likely to have a weak relationship to the design and delivery. This may or may not involve feedback on participants' progress dependent upon the provider/verifier's policy. Therefore the relationship is likely to be one-way.

FIGURE 1. SELF-FUNDED/ OPEN PROGRAMME MODEL

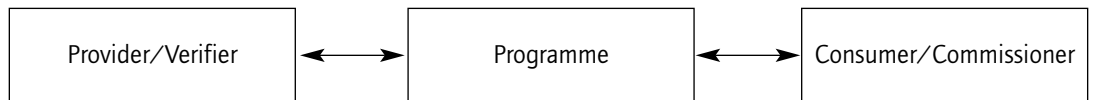


FIGURE 2. SPONSORED/ OPEN PROGRAMME MODEL

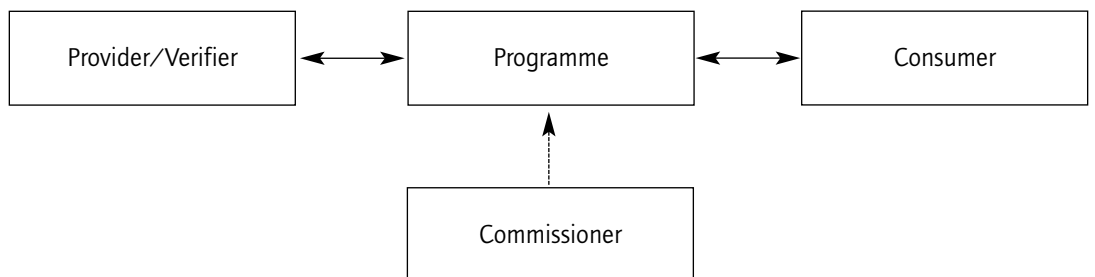
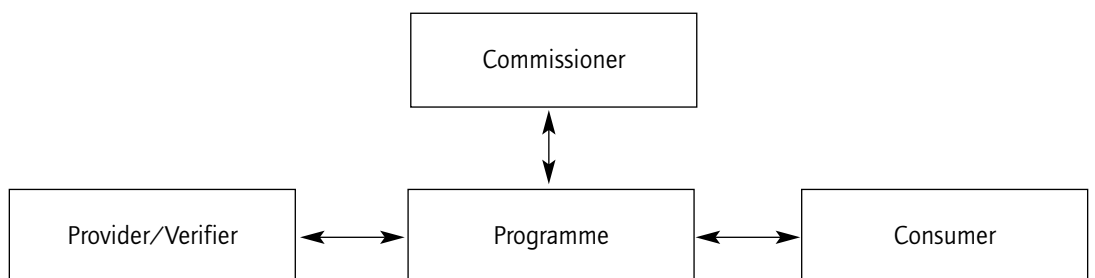


FIGURE 3. TWO-WAY PARTNERSHIP MODEL

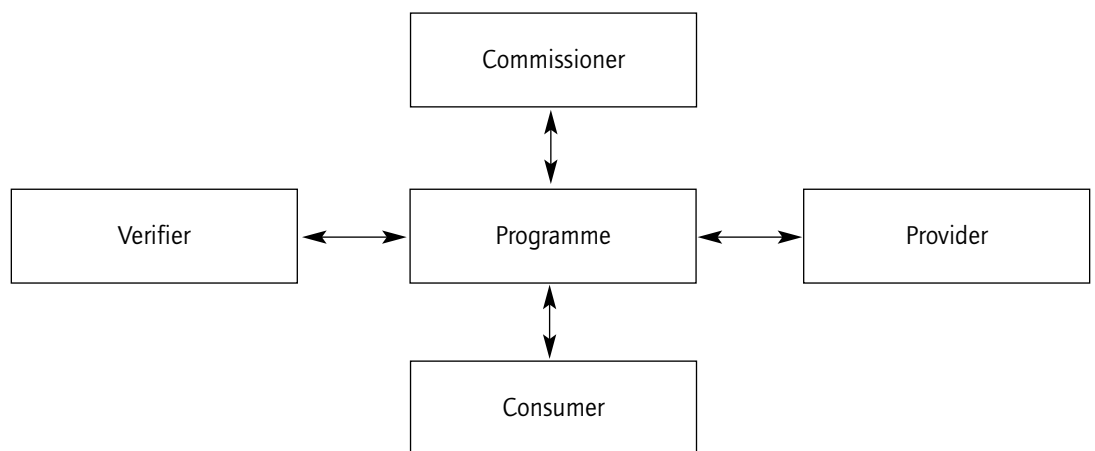


3. Two-way Partnership Model

In this model (figure 3), the role of the commissioner is much strengthened. The organisation has an important part to play in the design and sometimes even the delivery of the programme. It may well receive detailed feedback on how the course has gone and in some situations on how participants have performed. The programme is tailored to the needs and circumstances of the organisation. A criticism of this kind of model is that by making these programmes focus on one organisation, participants do not have the opportunity to learn from other organisations and/or sectors.

(CiM) and Diploma in Management (DiM), which are recognised post-graduate programmes validated and awarded by a UK university. The CiM is a full post-graduate certificate and the DiM is a post-graduate diploma that has equivalence to the Diploma in Management Studies. The way that the programmes have been set up are unusual in the higher education sector. They operate as the intellectual property of a private management development provider, who is licensed by the university to promote, develop, deliver and assess these programmes. Participants register as students of the university, but apart from quality assurance procedures and the ultimate award of

FIGURE 4. THREE-WAY PARTNERSHIP MODEL



4. Three-way Partnership Model

In this model (figure 4) the roles of provider and verifier are separated. The university retains the role of verifier whilst another party takes up the role of provider. The relationships of the organisation and the participant is retained. Of course, the programme may not be completely designed and delivered by an outside provider. This model can also work in the case of a part provision by a third party.

THE PROGRAMMES

This paper outlines two experimental management education programmes. For the last two years, together with colleagues at a UK university business school and a private provider, I have been developing and piloting a suite of in-house management education/development programmes leading to a university post-graduate Certificate and Diploma in Management based entirely in the organisation and assessed by work-related means. A follow-on Masters level programme in Change Management has just been launched and has recruited a healthy cohort of students.

The management development programmes are a specially designed Certificate in Management

the qualification, the university itself has no direct involvement with the programmes.

Candidates can take the Certificate as a stand-alone programme or continue onto the Diploma programme. Participants who have completed the Diploma can progress to a full Masters degree in Change Management. The university concerned felt that it could not supply the specialist staff to run these programmes themselves and that they did not fit with the more conventional range of degrees offered, and would be more suited to a niche consultancy to control. The consultancy was set up by an individual who, as well as having followed an active career in industry and commerce, had run similar work-based post-graduate programmes at the university before deciding to become independent. The programmes are currently designed around the following features:

- The focus is on development as a continuous process, rather than by education or training packaged in discrete blocks
- The emphasis is on outcomes in the form of defined management competencies rather than on inputs

- A more flexible approach to the process to learning and development, where participants may establish their own learning experiences within the programme and work to individually determined schedules within the overall framework. Individual learning contracts are used to facilitate this process
- Where possible, live organisational issues or problems are used for learning and development purposes
- A learner-centred approach is used where participants are encouraged to manage their own learning and development
- Organisational mentors are encouraged as an integral part of the developmental process
- The adoption of a collaborative approach between the participant, the learning resources of the university and the learning resources that exist in the organisation

The design of the programme is based on competence standards guided, but not constrained, by the Management Charter Initiative. Participants complete work-related portfolios (but not in the rather inflexible way required by National Vocational Qualifications) with a greater emphasis on the marrying of theory with practice. Portfolios on this scheme, therefore, tend to be less evidence-orientated and more cognitive based with more emphasis on the synthesis of theories and concepts.

In order to give the programmes some formal structure, both programmes are arranged around six work units. Different competencies must be satisfied under each heading for Certificate and Diploma in these areas:

- Managing one's own personal development
- Managing people
- Managing activities
- Managing information and using information technology
- Managing resources
- Managing the business environment.

In order to construct the portfolio, participants design and conduct their own work-based

assignment in each of the six areas. By way of learning process, an action learning approach (Revans, 1998) is adopted. Cohorts of participants meet for one full-day session per month where the day is divided into formal input and time spent in learning set activity. Each participant reports on progress made from month to month with input from their peers and the facilitator.

The Certificate programme is at post-graduate level, although, in common with most post-graduate management courses, it does not assume any previous academic knowledge of management. It does, however, require candidates to have some experience of work, preferably in a managerial or supervisory capacity. Some candidates could enter by holding other kinds of management qualifications, for example, a level 3 NVQ in management or a CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) qualification.

The programmes have been run in a variety of different settings, for example, in an international manufacturing organisation, a national trade association, and even with private individuals on an open programme basis. Two of these scenarios will be presented below.

METHOD

Two of the provider's client organisations were used as case studies. The evidence came from several sources, based on a stakeholder approach to the evaluation of training and development (see above). We looked at four stakeholder parties: the Commissioner (the organisation), the Provider (the consultancy), the Verifier (the partner academic institution) and the Consumer (participants).

For the Commissioner, evaluation data were gathered via feedback interviews with senior managers. For the Provider, an interview was conducted with the managing director, who was also the prime designer and deliverer of the management development programmes. For the Verifier, data were gathered via a series of meetings with a senior representative from the management department. As far as the Consumers were concerned, data were obtained via two main sources: post-course evaluations and face-to-face interviews.

THE CASE STUDIES

Case Study 1 - The Manufacturing Company
 Organisation X is a medium sized manufacturing organisation operating in the textile sector in the north of England. It is part of an international

group that has headquarters based on continental Europe. It employs about 350 people on the British site in a range of capacities, including management, technical and shop-floor workers. The management development programme targeted junior to middle managers, those, in the opinion of the directors, "with potential for senior management in the future". Participants were invited by the directors to take part. All participants were interviewed and fully briefed by the provider before signing up to the programme. The provider had conducted two prior meetings with the main board directors explaining and discussing the programme in detail and gathering enough information to customise and adapt the "core" programme to suit the client's business needs.

Students went through the Certificate programme first. There was a group size of about 12, and participants attended one day-long session every month for eight months. Following this programme, participants submitted their portfolios, which were assessed by the tutor and verified by a senior member of the university's management department academic staff. Successful participants were then awarded a university Certificate in Management. Those successful students who wanted to progress moved on to the Diploma programme, and, at the time of writing, they are about half-way through.

Case Study 2 - The Employers' Organisation

Organisation Y is a members' advisory organisation. The purpose of the organisation is to offer advisory and lobbying services to around 100,000 member organisations. This is a national organisation, organised through regional representation, with a headquarters in the north-west of England. It employs around 100 people, principally professionals and support staff. The management development programmes were at both Certificate and Diploma levels. The format of the programmes differed little to those designed for Organisation X, apart from the fact that case studies and examples were slanted towards a service sector organisation rather than a manufacturing one.

Around 30 students went through the Certificate programme. As in the case above, successful students wishing to progress went on to the diploma programme. They are half-way along that path at the time of writing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The evidence taken from both case studies was analysed in order to identify key themes and issues. Here follow summaries of the views, reactions and observations from key stakeholders on the experience of this style of learning, and the perceived benefits and drawbacks.

- The programme is in-house therefore it can be designed around pertinent organisational issues
- Tutors conduct extensive site visits therefore building up credibility through increased organisational knowledge and understanding
- Much more interaction at the design stage between educationalists (providers and verifiers), the organisation's senior managers (commissioners) and other key stakeholders, including prospective participants (consumers)
- Small teaching groups and lower tutor-participant ratios lead to more personalised learning experiences
- Temporal gaps between teaching sessions allows learning to "mature"
- Full day sessions fit busy managers' schedules better
- Flexible locations to suit the organisations/participants
- Action-learning approach appeals to practising managers
- Portfolio approach to assessment suits mature learners combining theory, evaluation, application and evidence
- Learning with/from peers leads to increased cross-functional co-operation and projects
- Participants develop informal cultural networks across the organisation
- Participants develop a greater understanding and awareness of issues across the organisation
- Overcomes the difficulty in finding the right staff in conventional business schools with a blend of practical experience at senior level and also academic experience to deliver this kind of management education.

The main disadvantages appeared to be:

- Learners from the same organisation tend to focus only on their organisation's issues therefore can miss the "bigger" picture: the skill and expertise of the facilitators have to overcome this
- Smaller groups miss out when people have to cancel at short notice
- Small groups miss out on large group interactions, for example on case-study work
- The portfolio approach to assessment and having to construct one's own assignments may not appeal to everyone
- Having to design and then conduct one's own projects can be daunting to some
- Some academic snobbery around non-traditional programmes without examined elements of assessment
- Some educational institutions' wariness of private-sector partnership arrangements

CONCLUSIONS

To summarise, there are significant advantages to be gained by all parties by adopting a collaborative approach. There are also some disadvantages.

For the **Commissioner**, the approach increases considerably the amount of influence and input that organisations have in respect of the management education programme. It gains the advantage in that work-related projects can be used as the learning vehicle. Not only do their staff learn using real live issues, the issues themselves may well become resolved as a result of the attention afforded to them. If the impact of the programmes on the organisation's effectiveness is more overt in this way, then the organisation may find it easier to evaluate the investment it has made and politically the programme may well gain a greater degree of regard amongst the key organisational stakeholders than might otherwise be the case with open programmes.

For the **Consumer**, this approach may well give them a way of using a style of learning that is more suited to the mature adult experienced manager. There is a greater degree of immediacy and relevance to learning that is work-related and

work-based. The methods of assessment may well be better suited to adult learners, especially for those not experienced in more traditional methods, for example, examinations. The increased emphasis on personal lifelong development has proved to be particularly useful for mature adult learners. The portfolios have, for example, in many cases become "living documents" that are regularly revisited, revised and utilised to facilitate future development.

For the **Verifier**, the main advantages seem to have been to provide ways of extending a traditional management education offering in a novel and innovative manner. In the particular cases studied here, the university received an income stream by way of a licence fee for very little academic and administrative time and effort. The Provider did everything to do with the programme, including the marketing, apart from the essential quality control procedures. This is a very cost-effective way of delivering part of a business school's portfolio. It also makes staff with the right mix of academic and commercial skills available to it without the need to employ them directly.

For the **Provider**, the approach makes available a strand of business that would be otherwise unavailable to the commercial consulting community. Several people who have the necessary academic and commercial skills do not wish to be formally employed in an academic institution but would like to do this kind of work. This approach enables them to do so. The principals of provider organisations have the freedom to market, design, deliver and assess the programmes in their own ways without undue interference from academic bodies. However, they can avail themselves of necessary quality assurance processes to enable their programmes to have desirable and transferable qualifications attached to them. This is a very powerful marketing tool.

The implications of what we learned from these two case studies for future developments in management education are wide ranging. As we have seen, there are distinct advantages to all parties in the collaboration approach. This does not mean that there is now no place for traditional management education such as the MBA. Rather than seeing these programmes as direct competition to existing university-based management education, the author sees them as exciting new niche products that can complement and inform traditionally taught programmes and

as a means of extending the portfolio of the conventional business school in a very cost-effective way.

This research is in its infancy and of course more needs to be done, especially looking in more depth at the expectations and experiences of the stakeholder groups. Such research is ongoing and will form the subject of another paper in the very near future.

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