

# 360°

The Ashridge Journal

Spring 2011

**MAIN FEATURE:**

## Influencing: The key to successful business relationships

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- Research overview
- Classroom 2.0: The future of education?
- Evaluation of management development programmes
- Does more pay equal higher performance?
- The value of meditation in management development
- Perspectives: Neuroscience, learning and change



**ASHRIDGE**

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# My angle

January 2011: a new year and the start of a new decade. At these moments, we could remind ourselves how little we humans know about our world, and how fragile and shifting our understanding is. We entered the new millennium anticipating continuing worldwide economic growth underpinned by globalisation and the spread of liberal democracy, following the end of the Cold War, memorably described by Francis Fukayama as the 'end of history'. We did not, on the whole, anticipate 9/11, the 'War on Terror', a growth in religious fundamentalism around the world, chaotic weather patterns, rising debate about the climate change, and a global financial crisis that nearly toppled the banking system. Our information-saturated world shows us that if we know anything at all, it is to 'expect the unexpected'.

What counts as knowledge and how we use it is increasingly contested. Top-down teaching by 'experts' to passive recipients is giving way to more participative approaches, in which knowledge is co-created by teachers and learners, drawing on different perspectives, challenging long-held assumptions and honouring the subtlety and richness of our organisational and social contexts. These sorts of questions are at the heart of our work at Ashridge, as this edition of 360° shows.

We have just launched the Ashridge Centre for Action Research. Action Research is a form of social research, whose purpose is not just to understand but also to transform the situations being studied: it is concerned with personal, organisational and ultimately social change. Furthermore, action researchers believe that we come to understand a puzzle or problem situation best by paying curious attention to how we behave in it (as opposed to how we say we behave) and noticing what happens when we behave differently. This involves engaging people in deeply questioning connections between their hopes, intentions and assumptions and their actual actions, and drawing out their emerging knowledge so that it can be critiqued and shared. Above all, action research is a way of researching with people, not 'on' them: it offers disciplines that can help groups of people with shared tasks research their own work and learn as they go. Knowledge, from this perspective, is an ever-moving process, viewing organisational life as a rich and shifting set of complex human interactions, rather than a monolithic and controllable human machine.

In the lead article, Fiona Dent and Mike Brent point out that relationships are the foundation of human existence. They explore how effective leaders in business use subtle processes of influencing to draw people into shared tasks and build their commitment. Among other things, leaders help those around them question and shift the beliefs and assumptions that keep unhelpful organisational patterns in place.

Emma Dolman and Dave Bond offer another dimension to this theme in their research on mindfulness in leadership. They ask searching questions about how we understand and assess the value of something as difficult to measure as meditation practice, when the evidence consists

of subjective, experiential reports. Yet people around the world demonstrate that they value meditation on a daily basis, by practising it. Kai Peters' article on new developments in neuroscience helps here: he suggests that data on electro-chemical functioning of the brain gives another perspective, indicating that meditation is associated with increased left-brain activity, which is also connected to feelings of optimism. Kai also explores the implications of this research for how learning programmes are conducted, suggesting that changing long-held beliefs and assumptions is no simple task.

Shirine Voller's work on how learning and development professionals use programme evaluation offers a good example of the difference between what we say ("we evaluate the effectiveness of our programmes and make rational decisions on that basis") and what we do ("participants enjoy them so they must be good"). She suggests there is potential for basing programme decisions on a much broader range of systematically collected evidence.

Ronan Gruenbaum explores the future of business education in the face of emerging web technology. Charting a move from expert-led one-to-many teaching towards democratic, chaotic many-to-many broadcasting, he challenges business schools to be able to show their value in the face of an emerging "communal common sense".

Steve Watson questions the thinking behind performance-related pay, drawing on a range of research that assesses its effectiveness in producing desired organisational behaviour. He suggests that viewing the workplace as a market, in which individuals behave in a transactional way, has limitations and may only work well in specific contexts. In particular it fails to account for the less rational behaviour of many people at work, whose motivation for acting may be more complex and socially-oriented.

So, as we attempt to make sense of this new decade, we might do well to remember the words of philosopher Blaise Pascal, a contemporary of Descartes: "The heart has its reasons, which reason does not at all perceive."



Gill Coleman

Director of the Ashridge Centre for Action Research

# Research overview



Compiled by Shirine Voller  
Research Manager

## New Books and Journal Special Issues

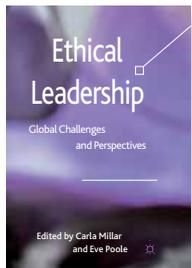


### The Future of Learning

Editors: Shirine Voller, Eddie Blass and Vicki Culpin

This book is divided into three sections: **Future Context** examines the leadership competencies required for the 21st century and scenarios for the future of the HE sector; **Future Learning** discusses the potential of Virtual Action Learning, the implications of Web 2.0 and how Generation Y is impacting the workplace; and **Future Learners** brings the needs of the learner to the fore.

*The Future of Learning* is priced at £60.00  
Palgrave Macmillan

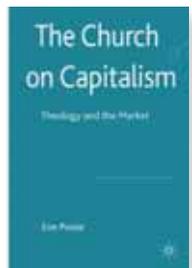


### Ethical Leadership

Editors: Carla Millar and Eve Poole

The authors present analysis, examples, and ideas about the future of ethical leadership, globally, in a lively yet academically robust format. The book offers views on the nature of the ethical challenge and perspectives for leadership ethics in the future, and presents the ethical leadership dilemmas of day-to-day international business life, providing a range of angles, options and ideas.

*Ethical Leadership: Global Challenges and Perspectives* is priced at £65.00  
Palgrave Macmillan



### The Church on Capitalism

Author: Eve Poole

Since the onset of the economic crisis, everyone has a view on how to fix capitalism. Given the widespread diagnosis of moral malaise in the marketplace, one might expect the established religion of the UK to provide more leadership. In fact, the Church did have a lot to say on the matter. Eve Poole examines the views and actions of the Church on capitalism and the market.

*The Church on Capitalism* is priced at £65.00  
Palgrave Macmillan



### The Journal of Management Development

Guest editors: Erik de Haan and Charlotte Sills

A vast body of research into successful outcomes in therapy and counselling – and more recently coaching – has identified relationship factors as being the most powerful factor in effectiveness. At Ashridge our approach puts the coaching relationship at the heart of the work, seeing it as the chief vehicle for change. For their October issue, *The Journal of Management Development* asked Ashridge to co-edit a Special Issue to explore the area of the Relationship in Executive Coaching. We invited coaching colleagues to join us and share their ideas and experiences.



### The Journal of Public Affairs

Guest Editors: Carla Millar and Roger Delves of Ashridge, and Phil Harris, Dean of the University of Chester

In August 2010, to mark its tenth anniversary of publication, the *Journal of Public Affairs* published a Special Issue on Unethical Leadership, for which it invited Ashridge to provide the editorial team. The editors also wrote the lead article *Ethical and Unethical Leadership: Double vision*. Other contributors included Kai Peters, Ashridge CEO and Kurt April, Ashridge Research Fellow.

## Published research

### Public Management Index

The Public Management Index (PMI) is a sector-specific version of the established Ashridge Management Index, which has been running since 1994. The publication of the 2010 PMI comes at a time when the public sector is facing huge challenges as the implications of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review become clear.

The PMI – undertaken just before the Coalition Government came to power – found that, despite all the pressures, management in the public sector is highly engaged, loyal, diligent, and hardworking. Contrary to stereotypes, public sector staff are prepared to take work home, go the extra mile, and work longer hours than they are contracted to do. They are hugely committed to helping public services change and succeed.

Over 50% of respondents expressed concern that top leaders spend insufficient time communicating with employees. A high percentage of staff saw organisational change as not only important, but a main part of their job.

Public sector staff scored their line managers consistently well for effectiveness, providing direction, support and being trustworthy. They also felt that their own managers made sufficient time for them: the picture painted is one of solid day-to-day management.

They were less convinced by their top leaders who rated more poorly and, although the trend over time has been one of improvement, the top leaders in the public sector continue to lag well behind the private sector.

Staff continue to feel snowed under by emails (70%) and are working longer hours to get the job done. At 98%, long hours were given the highest single score in the survey. This suggests work-life balance is under pressure with the risk of overload, fatigue and ill-health as high risk areas as the cost savings programme proceeds.

The report's findings suggest that top public sector leaders will need to communicate more frequently in an open and honest way, to build trust and engage staff through the difficult times ahead.

For further details, see [www.ashridge.org.uk/pmi](http://www.ashridge.org.uk/pmi)

### Doctoral and Masters research qualifications

We are delighted to congratulate three members of Ashridge staff who have recently achieved doctoral qualifications. Ghislaine Caulat and Sarah Beart graduated from the first cohort of the Ashridge Doctorate in Organisational Consulting (now the Ashridge Doctorate in Organisation Change). Priya Abraham received a PhD from the University of Vienna for her research on *Diversity in a large and complex international project* and Andrew Day has achieved a Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology and Integrative Psychotherapy with Metanoia Institute.

Shirine Voller and Angela Whelan both completed MSc research qualifications in 2010. Shirine's MSc by Research from Cranfield University is based on research into *The role of evaluation in decision-making about management and leadership development*. Angela looked at *The effects of ego depletion on performance* in her Psychology MSc from Birkbeck University.



Ghislaine Caulat



Priya Abraham



Andrew Day



Shirine Voller



Angela Whelan

# Ongoing research

## Experiences of being managed

Peter Shepherd, Senior Consultant at Ashridge Consulting, recently returned from a month-long global research field trip during which he conducted over 50 interviews with locally hired staff from an international humanitarian organisation.



Expatriate managers in this organisation typically rotate on a roughly bi-annual basis whilst locally hired staff – who are often in junior roles – tend to stay working in their country of origin. The result is that expatriate managers experience many different locations, and each location experiences a wide variety of managers. The aim of the research was to ask local staff about their experiences of being managed and, in particular, to ask about occasions when people think they have been managed especially well. The ultimate research purpose is to improve the practice of management within this, and other, organisations.

The research is based on highly personal accounts and stories of being managed. During the interviews, staff described what managers did when they were at their most effective, how they did it and some of the assumptions that the most effective managers appeared to share.

In the course of 51 interviews, Peter drew on 493 years' experience within the organisation. Visiting operations in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and the Far East, he spoke to people of 21 different nationalities in a variety of roles and from a wide range of backgrounds. The conversations were recorded on broadcast quality sound equipment and will be edited for a wider audience.

The next step is for Peter to reflect on and give thought to the interview as an event in itself. "I was left with the strong feeling that people were eager to speak to and be heard by their organisation through this research. I plan to think and read more deeply about that as I do the edits and write this experience up."

A fuller account of Peter's work will appear in a future edition of 360°.

## Personal trauma as a formative development experience

Many people suffer personal trauma in their lives, such as critical illness, bereavement or disability. These experiences may be personally life-changing, and as a result, they may fundamentally impact the way people view and approach work. However, if these experiences are not openly discussed at work, their developmental value both for the individual and their organisation is potentially missed. Consequently, this doctoral research project sits at the intersection between an individual's personal and professional life and aims to improve our understanding of the impact of personal trauma on the way individuals think and behave at work. As importantly, this research also seeks to understand the role of the organisation in supporting or hindering individuals post-trauma in order to better understand the characteristics of compassionate workplaces.



This is an interdisciplinary research project which brings together scholarly work from the fields of positive psychology, narrative research and positive organisational behaviour and examines them through a management lens. Personal narratives are being gathered from a number of past Ashridge participants who have experienced personal trauma about how their experience may have impacted the way they view themselves and their work. These personal narratives are being enriched by accounts from 'workplace witnesses', that is to say, work-based individuals nominated by the participant, such as colleagues, subordinates or line managers, who

can talk from a third party perspective about any changes they may have seen in the individual concerned at work post-trauma.

The outcomes of this research have the potential to impact leaders and HR professionals who are interested in fostering compassionate and positive workplaces. Equally, leaders and HR professionals who are concerned with the potential connections between levels of support for individuals post-trauma and their subsequent development and engagement at work.

*To find out more about this doctoral research, contact Amy Armstrong: amy.armstrong@ashridge.org.uk*

## Women leaders research

Over the years Ashridge has run a number of initiatives to help women managers, not least our contribution to the Mohammed Bin Rashid women's development programme in the Middle East. Now, some new research will explore the topic of women leaders. What currently is happening for women leaders? What helps them to develop their career ambitions? And what more can organisations do to ensure women have the right opportunities at the right time?

Fiona Dent and Viki Holton are leading the research and are currently collecting data from a survey and a series of interviews with senior women leaders. The research will be completed in Autumn 2011 and published in a book by Palgrave in 2012.



Fiona Dent



Viki Holton

## Research events

### Future of Learning Conference II 2-4 March 2011 Melbourne, Australia

This partnership conference, organised by Mt Eliza Executive Education, Melbourne, the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business and Ashridge, will be held in Melbourne in March. It will explore why and how people are likely to learn in the next decade, and the executive development challenges faced by business schools and buyers of executive education alike. Speakers from Duke CE, Ashridge, Mt. Eliza, Swinburne University and the University of Cape Town will use contemporary learning methodologies to demonstrate real time learning.

*For further information, please visit:*  
[www.ashridge.org.uk/futureoflearning2](http://www.ashridge.org.uk/futureoflearning2)

### Ashridge International Research Conference II, 10-12 June 2011

The second Ashridge International Research Conference will be held on 10-12 June 2011. Its title: *The Sustainability Challenge: Organisational change and transformational vision* conveys the emphasis on research into action that is at the heart of the conference. The conference is linked to special issues of the *Journal of Organisational Change Management* and the *Journal of Public Affairs*.

*For further information, please visit:*  
[www.ashridge.org.uk/airc2](http://www.ashridge.org.uk/airc2)

### Action Research Conference 20-22 October 2011

The Ashridge Centre for Action Research will host a conference in October 2011 for action research practitioners and clients interested in benefiting from what action research can offer.

*For further information, please visit:*  
[www.ashridge.org.uk/acar](http://www.ashridge.org.uk/acar)



**Fiona Dent** is a Director of Executive Education at Ashridge. She specialises in interpersonal and influencing skills, leadership, team working, and people management skills. Her current interests are in the areas of relationship management, influencing, self-managed development and women leaders. She has written extensively on the subject of Influencing in the business environment.

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**Mike Brent** is a Client and Programme Director at Ashridge. He specialises in leadership, team-building, influencing, coaching, cross cultural management, leading change and personal development. His interests include how to foster self-awareness and creativity, and how to challenge effectively. With extensive experience as a trainer, facilitator and coach, his interventions include designing and running workshops for many organisations in Europe, Asia Pacific and the USA.

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# Influencing: The key to successful business relationships

**In business, a high proportion of your working day is spent relating to other people – as a leader you need to focus as much on communicating, creating and developing effective working relationships, as you do on the functional aspects of your job. Fiona Dent and Mike Brent describe a range of tools and techniques to make you more effective in this crucial skill of influencing.**

## Introduction

Relationships are the bedrock of human existence – as humans we are the most social species after ants, termites and bees! We are social and political animals with an independent and an interdependent sense of identity. We *are* our relationships and the quality of our lives is a function of our relationships. As a leader and manager you need to focus as much on influencing, communicating, creating and developing effective working relationships, as you do on the technical or functional aspect of your job. So, whatever you do, whatever your level, and in whatever organisation, relationships matter for your effectiveness, reputation and success. You simply cannot be an effective leader or manager if you cannot effectively relate to and influence others.

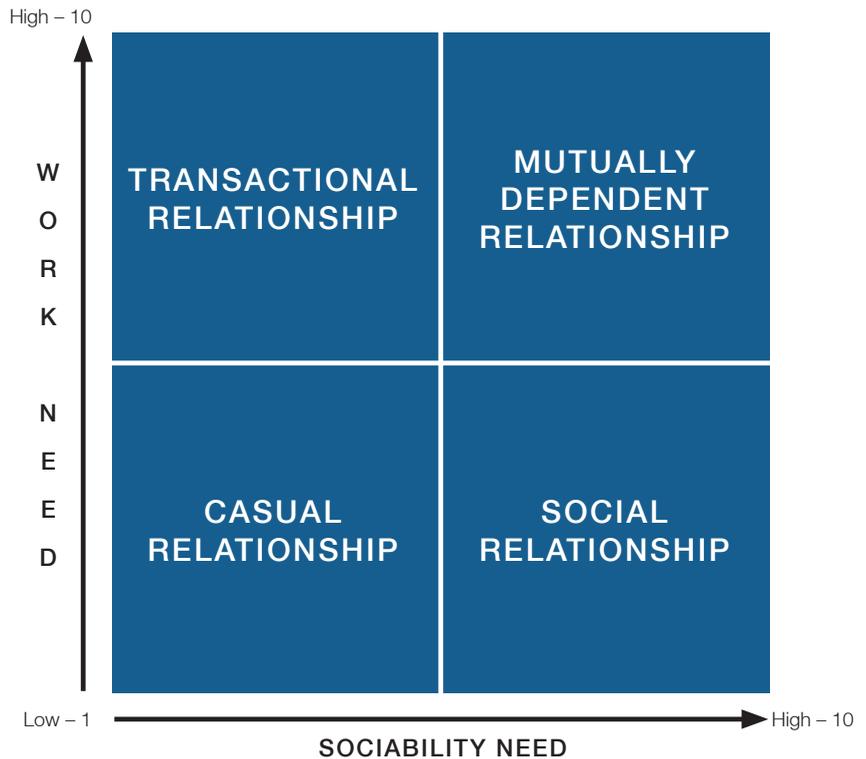
An important part of any working relationship is how you go about getting commitment and buy in from others to do the things that need to be done. There has been a general

shift from leadership by command and control to leadership through commitment and engagement. So, in this new way of working:

- How do you secure agreement from others?
- How do you get buy in to a project?
- How do you persuade and convince others?

Engaging with others, gaining commitment and influencing starts with the quality of the relationship which will undoubtedly affect your success as a leader or manager.

Based on our experience of working with thousands of business leaders and managers, we have developed a range of models, tools and techniques which are designed to help you become more effective in this crucial business skill. These are summarised in this article, and discussed in detail in our recently published book – *The Leader's Guide To Influence: How to use soft skills to get hard results*<sup>1</sup>.



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**Fig 1. Work based relationships model**

## The relationship model

Effective leaders understand that it is important to reflect on the quality of all your relationships, and to use the information effectively. We have created the following model to help you do this (Fig 1). The model enables you to assess each relationship based on its value to you for work reasons and for sociability reasons. Thinking about relationships in this context will help you to:

- Understand more about each relationship – why some are easy, difficult, challenging, frustrating, etc
- Reflect about your motivations for each relationship
- Assess the value of each relationship to you personally and for business related reasons.

The features of each category are as follows:

- **Casual relationship** – where there is a low work need and a low sociability need; a relationship that is not essential to core activities and is therefore a relationship that is peripheral and superficial. A relationship that is:
  - non essential
  - with a person you have little contact with
  - with a person you know very little about
  - with a person for whom you have neutral feelings

- with someone you are aware of but don't have much contact with
- superficial.

### For example

*Every morning and evening when you arrive and leave the office you chat and say good morning and pass the time of day with the security staff, perhaps chatting about their recent holiday or what they did at the weekend or previous evening. So, you are friendly to these people but they are low on both your work and sociability need scales – a casual relationship.*

- **Social relationship** – where there is a low work need and a high sociability need; where the main motivation for the relationship is an emotional connection which leads to friendliness. A relationship that is:

- non essential
- a person you choose to socialise with at work, perhaps having lunch with them
- a person you share ideas with and trust and respect
- a person who knows about you and you know about them at a more personal level
- a person you choose to spend time with.

#### For example

*Most of us have at least one person at work that we confide in – often this person isn't in our work group nor are they crucial to work but rather someone with whom you have built a trusting relationship, whose opinions matter to you and whose company you enjoy – a **social relationship**.*

- **Transactional relationship** – where there is high work need and low sociability need; those professional relationships necessary to get a job done. A relationship that is:

- essential for work
- with a person you would not naturally choose to spend time with other than for work reasons
- with someone you know little about but need to get the job done
- with someone you don't really feel strongly about
- with a person you know will be able to help you in your current role or project.

#### For example

*This is the person you know is crucial for getting your work done and someone you find difficult to relate to, so there is no other reason for the relationship to exist other than*

*for job related reasons – a **transactional relationship**.*

- **Mutually dependent relationship** – where there is high work need and high sociability need; where there is a balance of need from both a work and a social perspective. A relationship that is:

- based on mutual support and friendship
- with a person you know well and respect
- with someone you enjoy being with and is central to you getting the job done
- with someone who you enjoy sharing ideas, knowledge and experience with.

#### For example

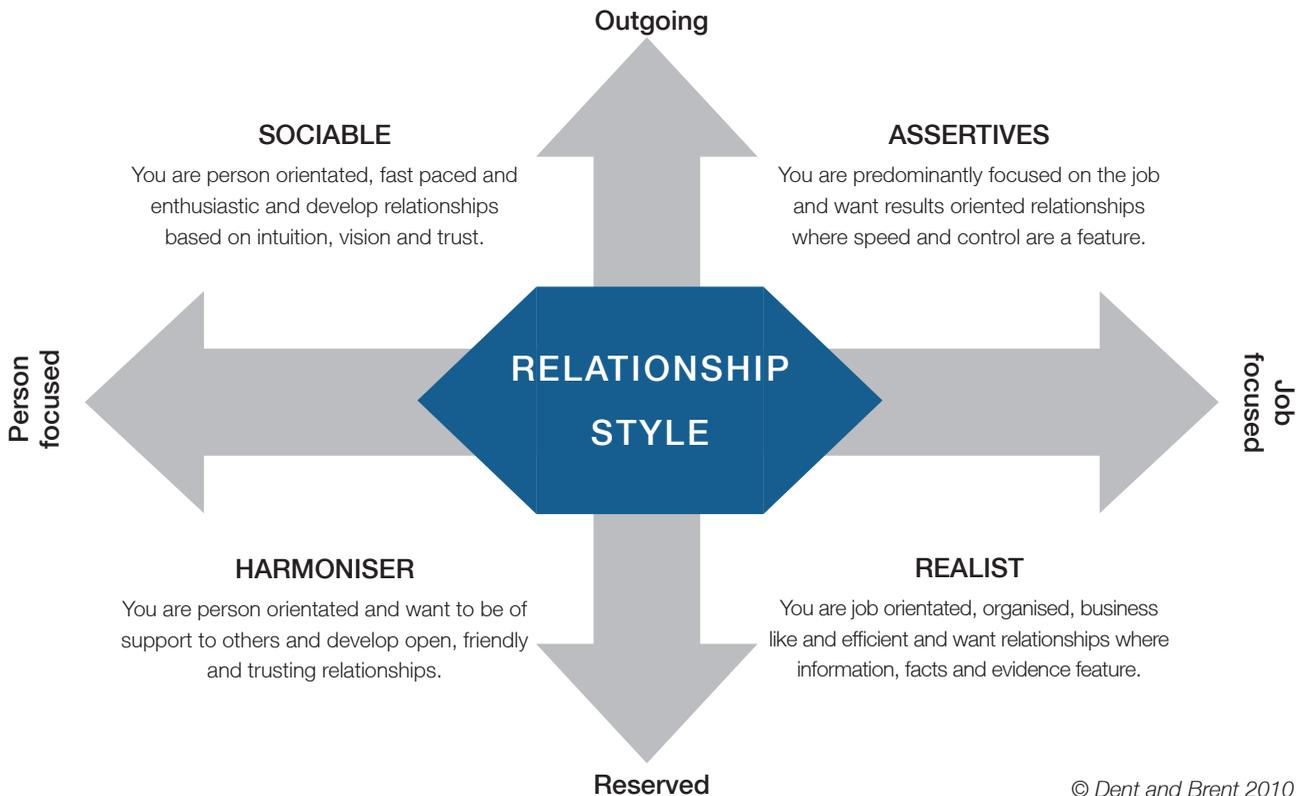
*The person you know you want to have in your project team – you enjoy their company and you know they do a great job; possibly even more than this you make a good team – a **mutually dependent relationship**.*

Influential and relationally intelligent leaders recognise that they will have work based relationships in all four categories; the important thing is to recognise which category each person falls into, and if it is appropriate for that particular person. If not then you may have to invest some time and energy into developing the relationship further to ensure you are getting the best from it.

In addition to understanding the quality and basis of your relationships, a key factor for understanding and developing influential relationships is having an appreciation of your relationship style. Most of you have a preferred way of working with others. This is based on your habitual behaviour and comes about because you have found that certain approaches, behaviours, and skills seem to work for you when interacting with others.

Fig 2. Your relationship style

The model below summarises one approach to understanding your relationship style.



No one style is best or worst, each style is simply different and each has its own positive and negative aspects. Your preferred style will have an effect upon the way you relate to others, how you are perceived by others and how others relate to you.

Our approach is based on a two dimensional model, where each of your preferences plays a role in the way you relate to people. (Fig 2). The preferences are:

- Are you more **outgoing** or more **reserved**?
- Are you more **person focused** or more **job focused** ?

Your positioning on these preferences then translates into your relationship style.

#### For example

*Jack is the Financial Director of a major international insurance company. He attended one of our recent programmes where we discussed the relationship style questionnaire. He found that his preferred relationship style is "realist" and he told us that he tended to use this style with all his colleagues and had wondered why this worked well with some people but not with others.*

*He had a challenging relationship with one of his direct reports, Tony, who wanted to adopt a more sociable approach where he chatted about non-work issues. Jack saw this as irrelevant and time wasting and became more and more frustrated.*

*Reflecting on this model, Jack realised that Tony tended towards a more sociable/ harmonising style and therefore had different relationship needs to Jack. Following this realisation, Jack worked hard to adapt, and flex his style to accommodate Tony's preference. This improved the relationship to such an extent that Jack and Tony now have a much more productive relationship.*

## Impression management and personal brand

Another area of relationship management that is often overlooked yet hugely important for how you set about creating and developing effective relationships is what we term impression management.

We often talk about first impressions and the importance of these for success in any interactive situation. What has become clear through our research is that the impact you have on, and the impression you create with, other people can make or break a relationship. So, what is impression management? Quite simply it is the effect you have on others and the feelings you leave them with when you have been interacting with them in any situation. Getting it right is about ensuring you give yourself the best possible opportunity to create a positive and lasting impression. Becoming more aware of the image you are portraying to others is a key element of impression management. So, like it or not, impression is based on the initial impact you make and then the subsequent feeling that you leave others with each time you interact with them. Image and impression management are vital in order to create and maintain effective influencing relationships.

When you meet someone for the first time, or enter into a dialogue with a person you don't know very well, you typically ask yourself a range of questions:

- What do I think/feel about this person?
- Do I like this person?

- Can I work with this person?
- Do I trust this person?
- Do I respect this person?
- Do I care what this person thinks about me?

This isn't necessarily a conscious process; you ask yourself these questions in your mind in order to assess your views about another person to determine how you will react to them, and whether or not you wish to develop a relationship with them.

The implications are that each and every one of you must be aware and take care to create and develop a positive impression on others. Remember your reputation is created by other people's impression of you. Creating and developing the right impression is one of the first opportunities you have to begin a relationship with another person. Get this right and you are off to a flying start; misjudge and get it wrong and you will have much work to do to get it back onto track (Fig 3).

The first things you notice when interacting with someone are:

**Visual impression** – which is based on the things you notice about the person and the details and specifics you become aware of, observe and take in. For example:

- Clothes
- Grooming
- The way you carry yourself
- Facial expression.

This then leaves you with thoughts, feelings and reactions to the person which lead to you forming either a positive or negative impression of the person.

**Body language** – is the rich combination of body posture, gestures, facial expression and eye contact. It is also how you as an individual express these when interacting with others.

**Vocal usage** – the way you use your voice – accent, pace, tone, pause, pitch, rhythm and emphasis and its effect on others.

**Language** – the words you use must be clear, appropriate, direct, descriptive and relevant.

How you use your body language, vocal usage and language when interacting and engaging with others can either support or negate the message you are trying to convey. In particular it is important to convey congruence between all three by matching to ensure that your language, body language and vocal usage are all in tune and conveying the same message. (For more detail on this topic see for example Pease B. and A.<sup>2</sup>).

All of this leads to **an impact being made** which is the first impression you leave people with and may lead to **rapport being developed**.

This encourages **interest to be generated** which can lead to **liking being developed**.



**Fig 3. Impression management**

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Taken together these aspects of your behaviour are the major components of impression management. Impression is important because it contributes to your overall relational and influencing credibility and reputation. So, the next time you are talking to one of your colleagues, imagine you are meeting them for the first time. What would you notice and what impression would that leave you with?

**For example**

*You are chairing a meeting with some clients; you have arrived early and are already in the room setting things up. The clients begin to arrive and you are ready to greet and acknowledge them but as they walk in they systematically ignore you, continue their conversations and don't offer a handshake or a "Good Morning". How do*

*you feel? What opinion are you now forming of these clients?*

*This happened to a consultant friend of ours recently. This left him wondering why he had been invited to run the meeting and furthermore left him with an extremely negative perception of the participants, which in turn negatively affected the process and outcome of the meeting.*

*For the clients to create a better impression, all they had to do was simply greet the consultant, shake hands and introduce themselves and things would have been more positive.*

*Or of course the consultant could have taken the initiative and approached them discreetly and introduced himself and welcomed them to the meeting.*

## Influencing: Tips and techniques

Managers need to focus on a number of tools, techniques and behaviours in order to improve their influencing and become more effective managers. Three of the most useful tools are:

- Framing and reframing
- Appreciation
- Language.

### Framing and reframing

Reframing is when you change the context or perspective of how a situation is viewed, with the intent of enabling people to view that situation in a more useful and productive way.

Think about how you normally frame your arguments. Whose perspective are you likely to be using? Naturally we tend to see things from our own perspective rather than thinking about how the other person views it.

So we need to listen carefully to others and frame any arguments to make them meaningful to others. That means that we also should be capable of reframing any existing argument – and adapting it to make sense to the person you are trying to influence. The way you act towards a person or a situation depends on how you frame that person or situation.

For example, if you frame someone as a problem performer (which we often hear in our work with managers) and focus only on when they are being a problem, you will not

be able to see anything other than problems. So it is helpful then to ask yourself some specific questions about this person in order to identify when they are not being a problem. In other words, you are reframing the situation from negative to positive. You can try to focus on times when they have demonstrated ambition or initiative. You can actively look for times when they have been helpful or have been successful or when they have shown creativity or support. It is unlikely that someone is a problem all of the time in everything they do, so explore and actively look for positives before rushing to judgement.

### Taking an appreciative approach

There are two key behaviours which summarise this approach:

- **Inquire more than you advocate.** This means that you need to be asking more questions and doing more listening rather than simply telling people what to do.
- **Be more appreciative than negative in your interactions.** For really effective relationships the ratio of positivity to negativity has to be five to one!

To develop and demonstrate your skills and abilities in this area you should:

- Start noticing small things that people are doing well and compliment them
- Start to say the positive and appreciative things you notice about others to your colleagues
- Think about your own behaviour and the balance of positive versus negative
- Set yourself a challenge to say at least three positive and appreciative pieces of feedback every day.

*(See also Cooperider D. and Whitney D.<sup>9</sup>).*

### For example

*Hans is the CEO of a small manufacturing company. He has a fraught relationship with his personal assistant whom he finds fussy, annoying and exasperating. The relationship has become progressively*

*worse over a period of time which led to the PA becoming unproductive. Hans' way of dealing with this was to focus on all the things that annoyed him and unsurprisingly this led to an even worse situation to the extent that the relationship was really beginning to break down.*

*Hans discussed this issue with us and we suggested that he try taking an appreciative approach rather than focusing on the negative. We helped Hans to develop a plan of action. This involved getting him to identify the positive aspects of her performance which he had previously ignored. Following a period of time where Hans applied this process, he found that his PA became much more motivated – she does more of what she already did well and is more receptive to developing her weaker areas. On the whole their relationship has improved dramatically and has become significantly more productive.*

*Hans has told us that this experience has taught him that you can turn round a difficult relationship and that appreciative principles actually do work.*

### Using influential language

There are many different aspects of language used in our conversations with people in business. We would like to focus on two types of language which we find used frequently when influencing – logical language and empathetic language.

- **Logical language** – This is the language of logic and analysis, of facts and figures, of detail, proofs, structure and graphs. It is clear, analytical, formal and unemotional. It is a common language among leaders and managers and is necessary and useful for influencing success. However, some managers can fall in to the trap of overusing it. Facts alone are not sufficient to convince everyone, nor do facts always create effective relations. The major drawback here is not so much the logic itself as the accompanying lack of emotion which leads to people giving the impression that they are not taking

other people's feelings and emotions into account. In relational influencing it is important to get the balance right in order to reach effective outcomes.

- **Empathetic language** – We would recommend that specialists add empathetic language to their repertoire. It is question based rather than directive, so this implies that rather than focusing solely on processes and logic, it is also beneficial to focus on understanding people's concerns, feelings and fears and consider their possible reactions.

If you are a manager in a sector/industry where there is a preference for using strong and logical language, you will probably need to become more skilled in using empathetic language. As we have said in our introduction, people are relational creatures and need to be listened to and involved in order to feel that their ideas are valued.

On the other hand, if you consistently use empathetic language, there will be times when this too is counterproductive. There are situations where you should try to use stronger and more direct language, for example, when you are in a pressurised situation and a decision is required, when you are regarded as the expert and others are looking to you for guidance and direction.

## Conclusion

Here are some top tips for improving your relational influencing:

- Admit mistakes
- Be flexible
- Observe and read the other person
- Manage your own emotions
- Be open to challenge
- Don't judge other people – remain neutral
- Listen and listen again
- Show appreciation and thank people
- Recognise people's efforts and contribution
- Enthuse your people
- Be fair
- Stay connected with your people.

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# Classroom 2.0: What is the future of education?

**Systems of learning have essentially remained the same for centuries: one person teaching a group of learners in a space called a 'classroom'.**

**With lessons for the L&D community, Ronan Gruenbaum relates how rapidly advancing technology is shaping the future of learning, how the role of the teacher is changing, and the idea of a classroom is becoming more and more irrelevant.**

## Telling it like it is

If you're reading this there is a good chance that you are no longer at school, although you surely subscribe to the idea and ideal of *lifelong learning*. If you're not too old, you will hopefully remember what teaching was like at school: the teacher, usually in corduroy trousers and a jacket with patched elbows; or twinset and pearls (depending on gender) would stand at the front and talk to the class. The class would sit in rows and listen, make notes and usually have something thrown at them if they spoke to each other (or was that just my school?).

The teaching paradigms have been the same for millennia, with formal learning from ancient Greece<sup>1</sup>, China<sup>2</sup> and the Middle East<sup>3</sup> onwards all revolving around the *expert* as the teacher; the *one* teaching the *many*<sup>4</sup>; and the classroom being the main location of that teaching.

Pestalozzi<sup>5</sup> suggested at the end of the nineteenth century that learning by doing is better than learning by rote, but the technology, such as it was, remained the same for centuries, namely teachers writing on boards at the front and pupils taking notes.

The second half of the twentieth century saw new equipment enter the classroom, starting with visual aids, photographic slides, TV and video; moving right up to interactive whiteboards, PowerPoint slides, PCs, laptops and handheld tablet computers or mobile phones.

The technology hasn't really made any difference, however, to how people learn in the classroom. The teacher is still at the front. The board might have been prepared earlier (in the form of slides) and the pupils or students take notes on touch-screens rather than using chalk and slate, but essentially they are still treating the *expert* as the teacher; the *one* teaching the *many*; and the classroom is still the main location of the teaching (even if we call it 'lecture theatre' or 'meeting room' for the participant on an executive education programme).

The learning standard of *one-to-many* was the same for information and news dissipation. *Old Media* consisted of TV, radio and newspapers run by a few large organisations and broadcasting to tens of millions of people. *New Media*, or the internet, didn't really change that: large organisations such as the *Financial Times*, the *BBC* or *Amazon* broadcast their news and sold their goods to millions of people. The new channels did allow, however, smaller organisations and individuals, if they had sufficient technical skill, to add to the noise and start broadcasting too, creating company and personal websites on pet topics that would find a niche on the internet.

### Everyone's a niche

The 'niche' can never be catered for adequately through the mass communication of old media – too few in the audience would be interested in the information to make it a worthwhile business model. Advertisers want large audiences to sell to, not specific groups

of a few dozen spread around the globe. The internet changed that, by allowing the global audience access to that information and, in the case of e-commerce websites like Amazon, the ability to purchase copies of those niche products. This concept of selling a few copies of a large number of products, rather than selling thousands of copies of just a few products, became known as the 'Long Tail'<sup>6</sup>.

A bookshop, for example, would traditionally hold only around 10,000 titles in stock at any one time to sell to customers in their immediate vicinity, let's say within a 15 mile radius, although that is probably generous. Those titles would sell in the hundreds and thousands. They are what the best-seller lists are made of. Online bookshops, such as Amazon, are able to have catalogues with hundreds of thousands or millions of titles and are able to sell to everyone the world over. 'The Long Tail' (Fig 1) refers to the way that the number of different titles that sell online stretch into the millions (the x axis in the diagram), but with only a handful of sales per title (the y axis). The interesting finding is that the Long Tail really does stretch out to include a large proportion of the catalogue, and when all those sales add up, they account for a larger revenue than does the traditional model.

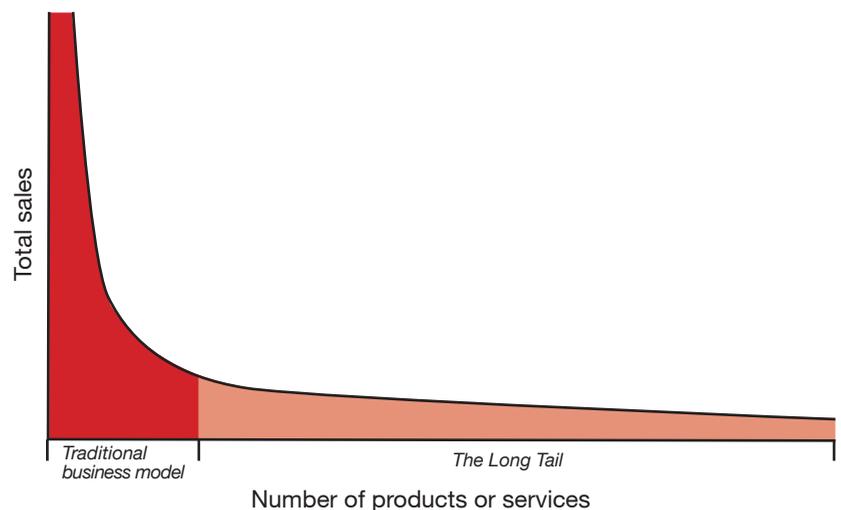


Fig 1. The Long Tail

The idea of 'niche' audiences permeates the internet. Google's Adwords model relies on the fact that someone, somewhere will be interested in a particular ad. But, rather than showing the same ad to millions of disinterested people, the target audience finds the ad through their search queries on Google.

This also explains how many millions of individuals are now able to broadcast their thoughts, opinions and hobbies and still find an audience. This new communication channel of many-to-many broadcasting has ushered in a new era known as *Social Media* or *Web 2.0*. *Enterprise 2.0* is a term coined by Andrew McAfee<sup>7</sup> of Harvard Business School to define the business use of social media, primarily internally for knowledge sharing.

The advantages of social media are not just that everyone can now become a content creator, but that everyone can also recommend, through links, tagging and social bookmarking, other content to their friends, colleagues and followers; they can comment on content and connect to others through social networks.

### 'Consensus' vs 'Expert'

This is an important innovation as, for the first time, the power of knowledge has largely been wrested from the hands of large institutions, and power is now shown through the sharing of knowledge, by proving one has it in the first place. The source of knowledge, however, is now more important than ever, and the ability to identify 'experts' in the noise of information is no longer the preserve of academic institutions. Peer review remains as important as ever. In the same way that an academic article must be peer reviewed before being considered 'valid', Google delivers its search results based largely on the approval of others, shown through the links that people create on their websites

pointing to sources of knowledge. If those people are themselves considered experts, by being the focus of large numbers of inbound links, then their outbound links are considered correspondingly more important. This is not an ideal system, as it suggests that the person with the largest number of followers on Twitter is the wisest, which is clearly not the case. The top four Tweeters at the time of writing are Lady Gaga, Britney Spears, Justin Bieber and Ashton Kutcher, each with in excess of six million followers on Twitter<sup>8</sup>. Barak Obama at number five is the only non-entertainment Tweeter, until *Time Magazine* at number 45 with 2.2 million followers.

Twitter is, nonetheless, an innovation in knowledge sharing. Instead of long articles or logical arguments, messages must be condensed to 140 characters. This includes any links to blogs, podcasts or websites where a longer argument might be expounded. From 2009 to 2010, the amount of information on the internet has doubled to one zettabyte<sup>9</sup> – that is a thousand billion gigabytes. With such a wealth of information, there is suddenly an important problem with finding relevant information. How can one be sure that the knowledge found is valid and expert? If one trusts the person linking to the information, then one will trust that link as much as one trusts the person.

Imagine, if you will, an Ashridge MBA class being given a link to an article. If the link comes from a member of faculty, that will, for good or bad, be viewed as more relevant information on the topic in question, than a link by a member of the class. A link from a class member will be viewed as more valid than a link from an anonymous blogger. However, how many class members are required to link to content for it to be more relevant on the topic than a link from the member of faculty? And to what extent can simply linking to content from another be classed as sharing knowledge? And to what extent is sharing knowledge 'education'?

According to research by Forrester<sup>10</sup>, people who link to other information are Critics – the other six roles identified by Forrester being *Creators*, *Conversationalists*, *Collectors*, *Joiners*, *Spectators* and *Inactives* – with Spectators being the largest group and Creators being the smallest. What the Forrester research shows<sup>11</sup> is that in South Korea in 2009, only 9% of people across all ages and genders were Inactive, compared to 18% in the USA, 23% in Japan, 37% in the UK and 52% in Germany. Not only are there significant national differences in the uptake of social media, as well as age differences (gender, according to Forrester, is not a big indicator of greater or lesser usage of the tools), but if you are not currently using social media at all (an Inactive) you are, except in Germany, in the minority.

### Collaborative learning

*Critics*, according to Forrester's nomenclature, also contribute to wikis. Wikis are simply websites that anyone is able to edit. *Wikipedia*, the free online encyclopaedia, is the best known example of a wiki. It displaced *Encarta* – the Microsoft encyclopaedia available on CD-Rom in the nineties – which had in turn displaced *Encyclopaedia Britannica* as the reference tool of choice. *Wikipedia* is often criticised for inaccuracy.<sup>12</sup> A 2005 study by *Nature*<sup>13</sup> showed that of 42 articles examined, *Wikipedia* had more errors per article than *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. However, from the sample tested, it also had more articles than *Encyclopaedia Britannica* that were completely error-free. Furthermore, or perhaps more importantly, the errors identified by *Nature* were corrected on *Wikipedia* within a few days, whilst *Encyclopaedia Britannica* has to await the next edition before mistakes can be corrected. *Wikipedia*, at the time of writing, has over 3.4 million articles<sup>14</sup> and over 1 billion words in English, compared to, for example, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*'s

120 thousand articles and 55 million words for the online version (fewer still in print).

Other wikis from the Wikimedia Foundation include<sup>15</sup> *Wiktionary*<sup>16</sup> (an online dictionary); *Wikiquote*<sup>17</sup> (a compendium of famous quotes); *Wikibooks*<sup>18</sup> (aimed, like *Project Gutenberg*<sup>19</sup> at making e-book resources available for free); *Wikinews*<sup>20</sup> (an open-source news reporting platform); and *Wikiversity*<sup>21</sup> (providing learning materials available to all on a wide-range of subjects, including, through Wikiversity Business School<sup>22</sup>, an opportunity to study Accounting<sup>23</sup>, Human Resource Management<sup>24</sup> and even the syllabus of an MBA<sup>25</sup>). No one will receive a certificate if they read through all the suggested materials on the Wikiversity MBA pages, nor if they read the similar free content on PersonalMBA.com<sup>26</sup>, but with so much content, and often very good content, available for free, it does beg the question “What role is there for business schools in the future?”

In addition to the sharing and acquiring of knowledge through wikis, blogs are increasingly used by faculty members in business schools both to publish opinion and stoke debate, and to build personal brands. They are also used to update colleagues on projects, and are used, for example by distance learners at Bournemouth University Business School, as learning journals to “*ensure individual reflection as part of the performance development planning process is captured*”<sup>27</sup>.

## Social learning

Perhaps the biggest bone of contention with social media, and the reason that many consider it to be a productivity limiter, is the phenomenon of social networks, such as Facebook and LinkedIn. Facebook now has over 500 million active users (classified as those who have returned to the site within

the last 30 days) with 50% logging-in on any given day, spending over 700 billion minutes per month on Facebook. Those statistics tend to make businesses believe that any employee using Facebook is wasting company time. However, since launching *social plug-ins* in April 2010 (allowing users on other websites to indicate whether they ‘like’ a site, a product or a piece of content which is then shared with their average 130 Facebook friends), 10,000 websites now integrate with Facebook every day with over two million sites having done so since April, “...including over 80 of comScore’s U.S. Top 100 websites and over half of comScore’s Global Top 100 websites”<sup>28</sup>.

There are two ways to interpret these statistics: firstly, that employees are wasting enormous amounts of time (although it is unlikely that each person logging in over the past 30 days has spent almost two whole days and nights on Facebook as the statistics suggest – more likely that they logged-in from their computer or mobile device and then kept the page open, or remained logged in even when they weren’t using it), or alternatively, that the Facebook platform has huge potential for the marketing of products and services direct to customer networks.

Social networks should not, however, just be thought of as marketing devices. Internal company networks (formerly known as ‘staff directories’) are often used by employees to showcase their own specialisations and, by extension, to help others to find them when seeking that expertise. Both Facebook and LinkedIn have been extensively used as recruitment tools. There is no reason, furthermore, why Facebook could not be used as a free learning platform: setting up a private group for a particular programme and using it to share textual and audio/video content, create polls, conduct discussions on specific topics and, through third-party apps, video conferencing and slide sharing can also take place.

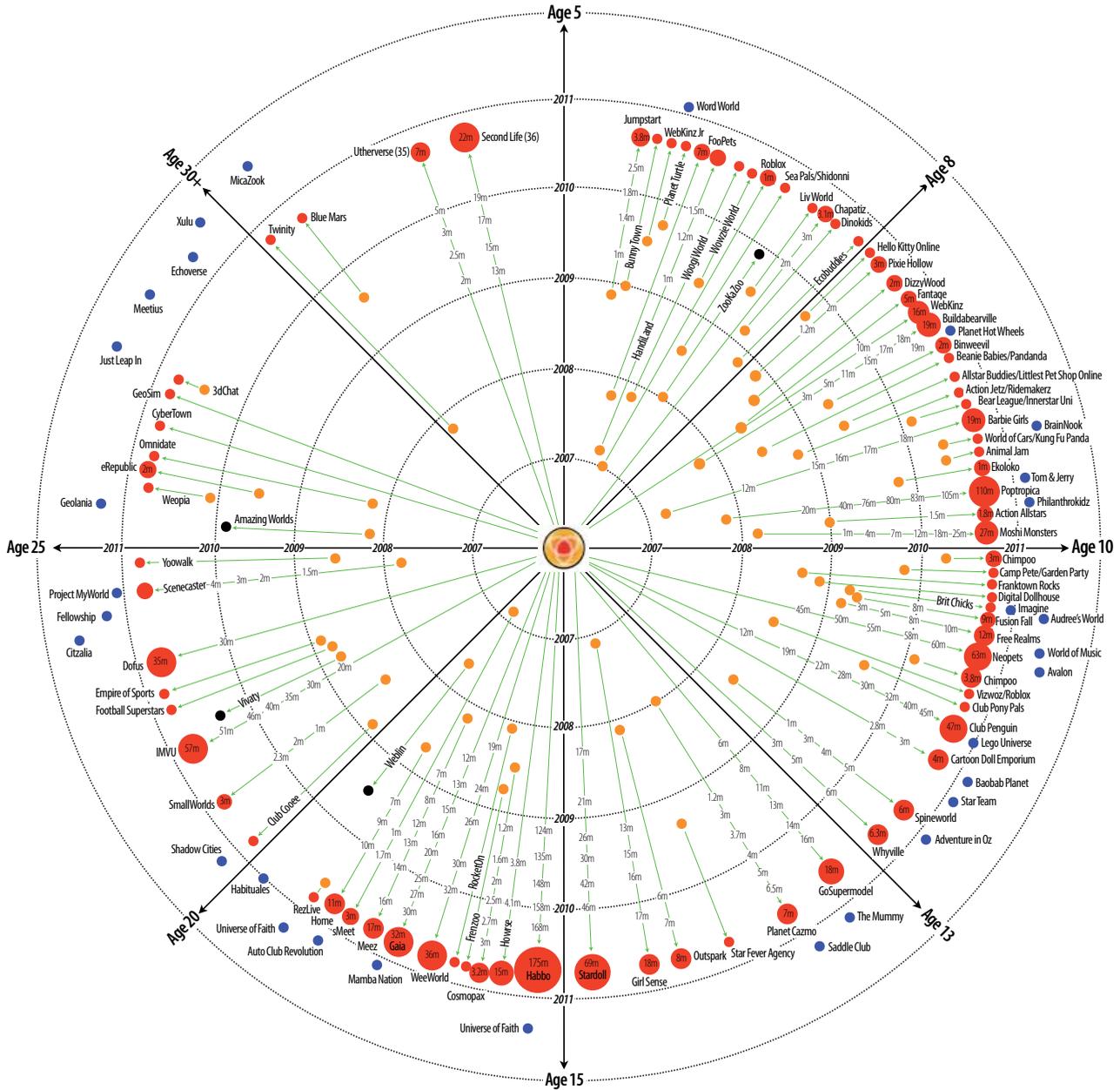


Fig 2. Virtual worlds registered accounts Q3 2010

- Live or open beta
- Launched in
- Closed
- Closed beta/in development

No data shown for worlds under 1m registered accounts. Includes estimates.

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## Virtual learning

The clearest example of classrooms without walls must be the use of *Multi-User Virtual Environments* (MUVEs) or 'Virtual Worlds' for education. MUVEs are not to be confused with *Massively Multi-Player Online Role-playing Games* (MMPORGs) such as *World of Warcraft* in that they do not, unlike MMPORGs, tend to have a 'goal' or 'purpose' to using them. They are, as the name suggests, three-dimensional graphic online environments where users interact with each other through the three-dimensional graphic online representations of themselves called *Avatars*. Second Life is the best known virtual world, but according to the virtual worlds consultancy, KZero, there are over 70 MUVEs in existence catering for all age groups and subject matter<sup>29</sup> (Fig 2).

Where Generation X grew up with television and computer games, and Generation Y grew up with the internet, the next generation are growing up with virtual worlds. *Habbo*, for example, has over 150 million registered users alone, with 90% between the ages of 13 and 18 in over 150 countries<sup>30</sup>, and there are dozens of other MUVEs available.

Arguably, virtual worlds are not the right learning environment for the current crop of managers and leaders, although plenty of education is already taking place there, from language teaching to role-playing<sup>31</sup>, and from online virtual lectures<sup>32</sup> to simulations<sup>33</sup>. There are various barriers to entering MUVEs, not least the practice required to engage with them properly. What is likely, however, is that the teenagers currently engaging with different virtual worlds may expect to conduct part or all of their learning in virtual worlds when they join the corporate treadmill – and those education providers able to meet that need will be at a distinct advantage.

The other area that business schools need to be wary of, however, is ensuring that the learners of the future can see the value of the education they can get through formal management development, as opposed to that they can obtain for free online or through their own extensive virtual networks. Whereas the expert has traditionally been the teacher, it is no longer clear how expert the teacher is. Is the teacher the 'sage on the stage', the 'guide on the side', or the 'crowd in the cloud' where education is disseminated not through an expert but through communal consensus? And as education, both formal and informal and many-to-many, moves online, and learners and teachers can connect from home, what role will bricks-and-mortar academic institutions have in the future?

## The future of learning?

Kurzweil's *Law of Accelerating Returns*<sup>34</sup> suggests that the development of new technology will increase exponentially. Compared to the 100 years of progress seen in the 20th century, the 21st century will experience the equivalent of 20,000 years' progress at today's rate, so it is clear that the delivery of education will be immeasurably different in a hundred years' time. What is not clear, however, is how quickly it will change beyond recognition, and how the L&D community is going to cope with it. Will the drive for change come from the students or the teachers? Will teachers of executive education exist as a profession? Will electronic implants, already enabling thoughts to be transmitted over the internet<sup>35</sup>, allow us to have instant access to all information, forgoing the need to learn and memorise? And if that happens, what role would the education sector play at all? It is not just the classroom that is changing, but the way we learn, think, interact and behave.

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## Re-framing programme evaluation

Ashridge research has shown that formal evaluation practices have only a limited influence on the way decisions are made about management and leadership development programmes.

Shirine Voller considers how a model of Evidence Based Management might stand L&D professionals in good stead for improving the decision-making process and bringing evaluation to the top table.

This article takes a fresh look at a jaded topic: the evaluation of management and leadership development. We look specifically at how evaluation supports the decisions that need to be made about development programmes, and what else influences these decisions. We introduce Evidence Based Management as a potentially useful model for re-framing evaluation in the wider context of decision-making, and discuss what this might mean for those with a stake in management and leadership development programme decisions.

The article is based on research conducted in 2010, but before we look at the empirical evidence, let's quickly review the purpose and significance of programme evaluation:

Different stakeholders will have different expectations about the purpose of evaluation – indeed, if you have been involved in evaluation yourself you may well identify more strongly with one or other of the purposes given above. Differences in expectation are not always aired and shared. This is important, because what is an appropriate choice of evaluation design and methodology for one purpose may be entirely unsuitable for another. So, if purpose isn't clear and aligned up front, it can lead to confusion and compromise further down the line. Setting such challenges aside for the moment, however, there is widespread agreement that a key function of evaluation – whatever its purpose – is to provide good quality information to inform future decision-making<sup>3</sup>.

## Why evaluate?

We evaluate management and leadership development programmes for a variety of reasons. These reasons can be summarised as Proving, Improving, Learning and Controlling<sup>1,2</sup>. Whether evaluation is to prove, improve, learn or control is at the heart of the distinction between summative and formative evaluation, and between a focus on process or outcome. Summative evaluation is about proof and control, whilst formative evaluation is about improvement and learning (see Fig. 1).

## The evidence gap

Despite evaluation being ostensibly action-oriented – we do evaluation in order to have better information on which to act – there is surprisingly little evidence of how evaluation data is really used in organisations to support decision-making. Compounding this gap, many evaluation models, Kirkpatrick's<sup>4</sup> four-step framework included, have been criticised for being founded on unrealistic assumptions about how people make

Purposes of evaluation	Process	Outcome
<b>Summative</b>	<b>Controlling</b> Is it going according to plan?	<b>Proving</b> Is it achieving what was intended?
<b>Formative</b>	<b>Improving</b> Is there a better way of doing what we are trying to do?	<b>Learning</b> Can we re-visualise what we are trying to do?

Fig 1. Purposes of evaluation (Easterby-Smith, 1994). Reproduced by kind permission of Gower Press.

decisions<sup>5</sup>. Critics argue that this is why models of evaluation are rarely used in practice by those responsible for designing and implementing evaluation processes.

### Addressing the gap

We decided to explore this conundrum with a research project that looked at how companies make decisions about management and leadership development programmes, and how they use evaluation to inform their decisions.

We chose to focus on private sector companies because most published evaluation studies are about leadership programmes for the public sector – the private sector is drastically under-represented. All the companies we chose to look at operated internationally and had commissioned customised leadership programmes for levels of management ranging from high-potentials through to senior management.

We selected eight programmes and interviewed multiple stakeholders from the client and provider side in order to construct a robust 'story' about each programme. Industries represented in the sample included: construction, petrochemicals, pharmaceuticals, financial services and

professional services. The design of the programmes varied: at one end of the spectrum was a five-day single-module residential programme; at the other end, an 18-month development experience focused on personal coaching. Most of the programmes were multi-modular and several involved between-module workplace learning or projects. Some programmes had recently been commissioned by the client organisation whilst others had been running for a longer period of time and multiple cohorts of participants had been through the programme.

In each interview, we asked questions to elicit how decisions were reached at each step in the programme lifecycle, and then discussed how evaluation had contributed to these decisions. We framed the programme lifecycle as starting with identification of development need, and progressing through a process of provider selection and programme design, culminating in programme delivery, often followed by programme modification and repeat (see Fig. 2).

### So how is evaluation used?

We found that the stage in the lifecycle of a management and leadership development

programme to which evaluation contributes most significantly was improving the design, i.e. modifying it after one iteration and before the next. We found no evidence to suggest that evaluation affects the decision to commission a programme or choose a provider, and limited evidence of the extent to which evaluation affects the decision to continue, postpone or cancel a programme.

Interestingly, processes and data other than formal evaluation were highly influential in the decisions to which evaluation also contributes. On the client side, senior managers, programme managers and programme owners were all influenced by their direct experience of a programme. These experiences included the informal conversations that occur during and after a programme with participants and their line managers, and noticing changes in participants' behaviours and organisational practices thereafter.

These processes tended not to be considered as 'evaluation', because there was no intent to capture and collate data in a systematic way – one of the defining features of formal evaluation. Yet such mechanisms were highly influential in how key stakeholders of a programme gained an impression of whether or not it was working, and what impact it was having.

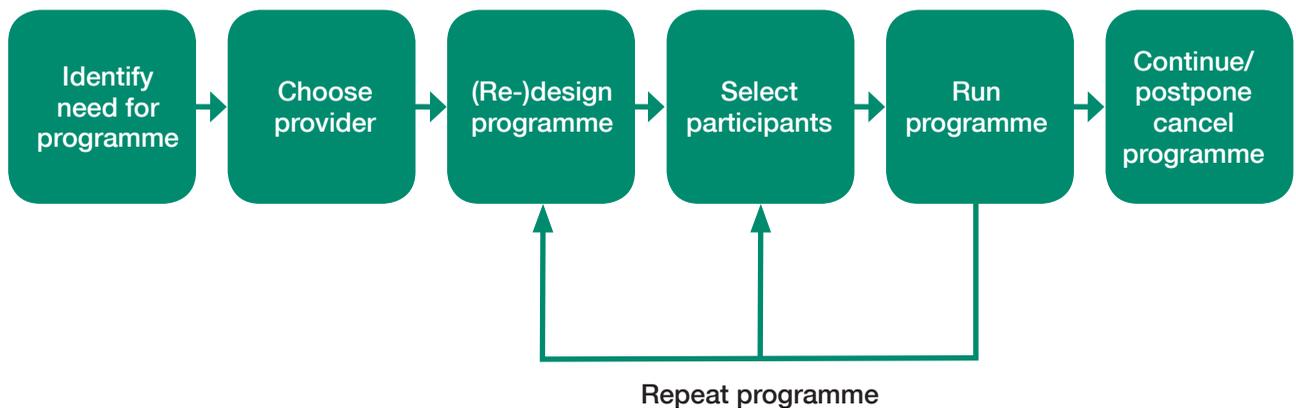


Fig 2. Lifecycle of a typical customised management/leadership development programme

## Taking stock: re-framing evaluation for greater utility

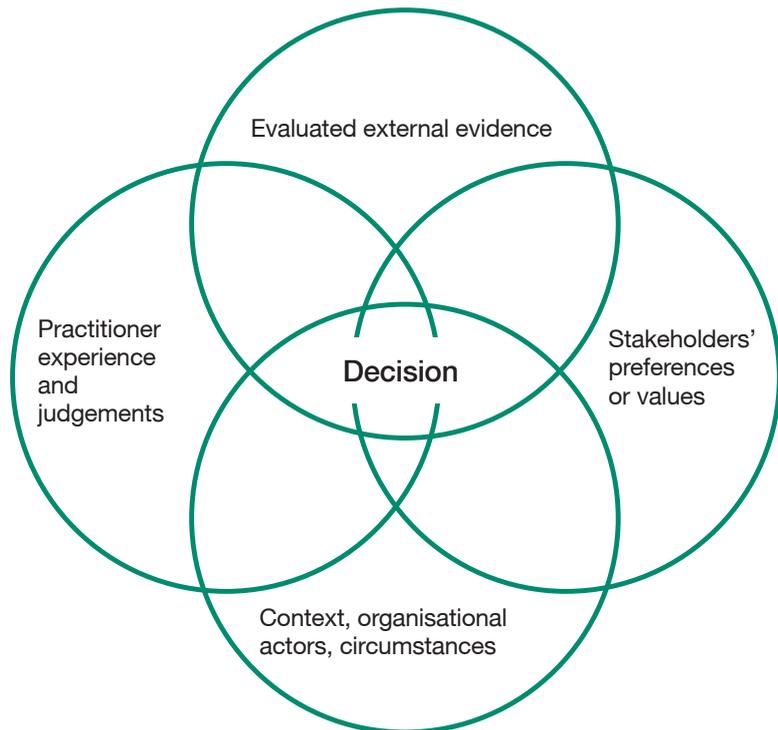
Our research suggests that there may be an opportunity to drive improvement across the L&D portfolio through better use of evaluation. For instance, if L&D professionals recognise that formal evaluation currently plays only a small part in the decision-making process, they could focus on making the other influential factors explicit and be selective in how these various influences come together.

A concept that we think is helpful in re-framing evaluation as part of a wider decision-making process is Evidence-Based Management<sup>6</sup> (EBMgt) (Fig 3). Evidence-based decision-making emerged from the medical sciences, but is now finding its feet in the field of management.

EBMgt is described as: “making decisions through the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of four sources of information: practitioner expertise and judgement, evidence from the local context, a critical evaluation of the best available research evidence, and the perspectives of those people who might be affected by the decision”<sup>7</sup>.

Proponents of EBMgt argue that optimal decision-making happens when evidence from all four elements of the model is effectively brought together, recognising that the emphasis placed on each element will vary from decision to decision. Our research shows that, currently, decisions about management and leadership development programmes are being made using a combination of elements of the EBMgt model, but that not all of these elements are being used to best effect. (Fig 4).

We found that those responsible for decision-making rarely draw on evaluated external evidence – one of the four elements



**Fig 3. The evidence-based management model (Briner et al., 2009)**  
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– about ‘best practice’ in either learning design or approaches to evaluation. Further, information about context, organisational actors and circumstances tends not to be gathered in a systematic way, and formal evaluation processes – one component of ‘context’ – often lack influence. Therefore, decisions are based predominantly on the preferences of key stakeholders, and the largely implicit and subjective experience of the L&D professionals and providers responsible for commissioning, designing and delivering the programmes.

### Conclusion

We believe that there is an opportunity to explore how to better integrate all four elements of EBMgt in order to improve the way in which decisions about management and leadership development programmes are reached. If this could be achieved, and evaluation conceived of as a valued part of an evidence-based approach, perhaps evaluation would become a more respected activity, and decision-makers would make decisions with greater awareness and better information, which would surely be a positive step.

Overleaf is a summary of how decisions are made in each stage of the lifecycle of a customised management/leadership development programme.

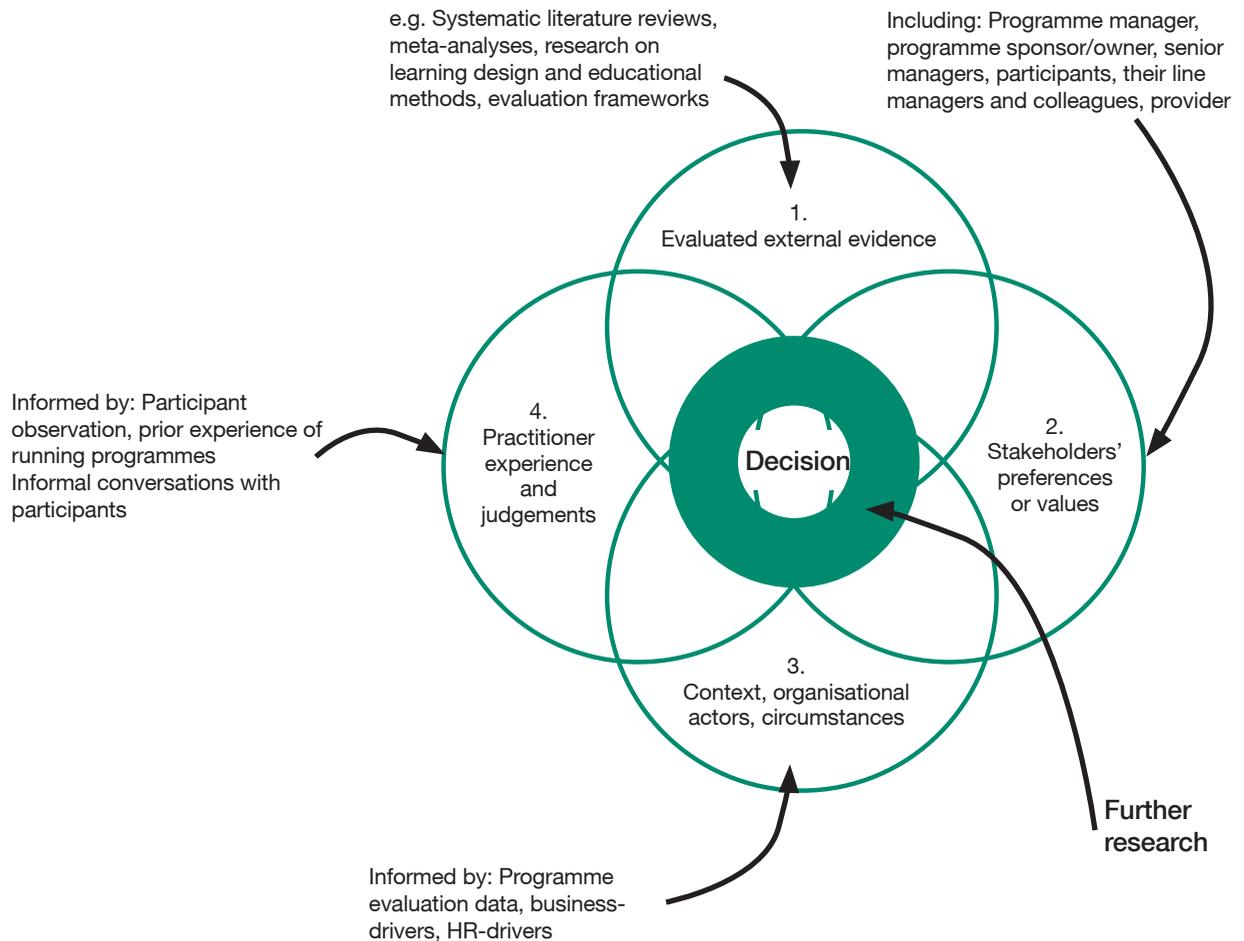


Fig 4. Modified EBMgt model reflecting decision-making about management and leadership development programmes

## Summary of how decisions are made

### Identify need for programme

Our research shows that two main strategies tend to dominate in the conception of a programme, here labelled 'HR/L&D-led' and 'business-led'. HR/L&D-led strategies build on beliefs about the general benefits of management development for particular levels of management, while business-led strategies focus on specific organisational challenges which a management development programme is intended to address. In both cases, for programmes pitched at high potentials and mid-senior management, there is close engagement of HR and L&D professionals with senior management in the early stages of developing the concept and choosing a provider to run a programme. This close engagement stems from the significant financial investment these sorts of programmes entail, and because of the strategic importance of potential programme outcomes on organisational performance. Indeed, the impetus for a new programme is often the recruitment of a key stakeholder, for example, a new L&D lead brought in to develop a coherent suite of management and leadership development programmes. These individuals, understandably, will be personally invested in the programme, as their professional reputation is linked to its perceived success or failure.

### Choose provider

We find that there are usually one or two key individuals behind a decision to commission a programme, although the decision-making structure is frequently broadened to encompass a wider group of stakeholders. While this may in part be an attempt to reach a better decision through the collective rather than the individual – a so-called 'structural model' of decision-making<sup>8</sup>, our research shows that more often than not it is about

orchestrating stakeholder engagement. This increases buy-in, ensures shared responsibility for the investment, raises awareness, and eases programme roll-out.

In choosing a provider to run a programme, we find that formal tendering processes are often complemented by existing personal relationships between provider and client, or by the opinions of one or two influential stakeholders. In most cases, a rational decision-making process is espoused, which assumes there are no biases<sup>9</sup>, yet decision-makers inevitably bring their own prior experiences and mental models – intrinsic biases<sup>10</sup> – to bear. While these can skew decision-making, it may be more helpful to recognise and value this bias by rendering it explicit, in order to deal with it more openly. For instance, during the commissioning process, providers are often approached on the basis of their reputation. What constitutes a 'good reputation' is susceptible to a high degree of subjectivity. Metrics may include performance criteria such as turnover, the scale of an operation, the quality of the client list, external ranking, international penetration, and word-of-mouth. But does strong performance across such criteria correlate with the delivery of successful programmes? And is this in turn proven by evaluation data? We have found no explicit evidence of evaluation data being used in this way.

### (Re-)design programme

We found that the main contribution of formal evaluation to decisions made about a programme is in modifying the design after one iteration and before the next, perhaps between pilot and roll-out, with the purpose of improvement<sup>11</sup>. Typically, what Kirkpatrick would describe as 'reaction' data is used<sup>12</sup>, gathered from end-of-programme review forms. The process of using evaluation data to inform design changes is simple, timely and cost-effective, because the barriers to implementation are low. In most cases, the

process is led by the programme provider and serves also as a means of quality control, enabling comparative assessments of programmes and faculty. Programme review forms are, however, only one of a number of influences on the decision to modify programme design. Often, additional data is solicited from participants and other stakeholders for this purpose. This is sometimes considered as part of the evaluation process both by the client and the provider – who are typically the lead stakeholders in any decision to modify programme design – but this is usually supplementary to the main evaluation effort. Such data is retrospective and programme-specific: it is concerned with what worked, what didn't, and what could be improved for next time, though it may ignore a key mechanism of change by not focusing on the 'why'<sup>13</sup>. The decision to modify programme design is also influenced by external factors, such as new strategic priorities and changes in the business environment, as well as perceptions of programme success. These influences tend to come from senior stakeholders like the executive board or the programme steering group. Evaluation with the purpose of improvement is widespread, but it is only one of a number of influences on design modification.

### Continue/postpone/cancel programme

Evaluation also contributes to the decision by a client organisation to continue running a programme. A first iteration is often positioned as a pilot, with the expectation that whether it goes well or badly, the decision is whether and by how much to change it before the next iteration, rather than whether or not to continue running it. Thus, whilst a programme which hasn't started out as well as planned may appear vulnerable, it is often in the interests of the programme manager and senior stakeholders, as well as the programme provider, to make changes in an effort to ensure the programme's

improvement, rather than to cancel it outright. Decisions are in part influenced by the parties' own stake in the outcome, and forms part of the political context in which evaluation exists<sup>14</sup>.

Beyond the initial piloting stage, the decision as to whether to keep running a programme, albeit with modifications, or to postpone or terminate it, is subject to a range of factors. Interestingly, our research suggests that factors detached from the perceived impact of the programme, such as departmental budget cuts and changing strategic priorities, are most influential in the decision to terminate a programme. Poor participant feedback is often cited as a reason to stop a programme, but we found no examples where this had actually happened – perhaps because the programmes included in the study were all being positively received.

Beyond formal contractual arrangements, and personal stakes, there may also be an element of status quo bias,<sup>15</sup> that is, the 'non-decision' of continuing as before, unless there is an obvious reason to do otherwise. Sometimes clients believe that, if care has been taken during the design and development phase, a programme should deliver value, and formal assessment of this value is surplus to requirements. In other cases, data indicating a programme's positive impact is considered important, regardless of the care taken in its design. In this instance, formal evaluation processes contribute 'proof'<sup>16</sup> although such processes are perhaps best understood as providing reassurance to both the commissioners and provider of the programme. This is because our research has shown limited use of so-called 'impact evaluations'<sup>17,18</sup>, i.e. those seeking to prove the effectiveness of a programme in changing behaviours and contributing to individual and organisational outcomes. Impact evaluations focus on the 'higher' levels of Kirkpatrick's evaluation framework: behaviour and results. We found more evidence of 'lower' level evaluation practices. Additionally, the distinction

between pragmatic evaluation in the here-and-now that supports decision-making about the programme being evaluated, and evaluation that contributes to a body of knowledge and is used for future reference, is important. Both types should inform decisions about programmes<sup>19</sup>, yet there is little evidence that L&D practitioners consciously use programme evaluation from one programme to inform the development of the next.

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# Performance pay: Leadership prescription or class A narcotic?

**More pay equals higher performance: this equation is under considerable scrutiny in many business situations. Steve Watson presents the opposing arguments and provides recommendations for those managing performance.**

Over the last few years, the issue of pay has rarely been out of the news. Fairly or unfairly, the bonuses paid to bankers have become the most contentious example. This is to some degree due to the allegations that broad economic structural damage resulted from their pay schemes, further fuelled by the fact that taxpayers in a number of countries were called on to bail out leading financial institutions. However, other groups, while less frequently cited, are attracting their share of criticism, or at least challenge: CEOs and their pay multiples; the packages of senior public sector managers; and the extent to which French and English national footballers deserved their pay in the face of indifferent pitch performances was called into question during the 2010 World Cup.

The topic is formidably broad and complex as it combines the effects of many factors: the role and effectiveness of incentives; motivation and leadership; performance management; base pay versus bonus/variable element; risk-taking; individual versus organisation trade-offs; pay multiples etc. In the eyes of the public it is often about fairness. Anne Sheehan, director of corporate governance for CalSTRS,

the Californian state teachers' retirement system, is quoted in *Harvard Business Review*:

*"I think the matter of pay has moral connotations when you consider that regular working people have lost half of their retirement savings and many have lost their jobs, only to see over the top bonuses paid out to those responsible for the mess."<sup>1</sup>*

While perceptions of fairness and morality may affect organisational engagement and effectiveness, the question we focus on in this article, is:

### Does pay for performance work?

We shall consider the evidence from laboratory and field studies, business journals, books and other writing.

## ARGUMENTS FOR

Outside sections of the popular business press and handbooks of celebrity CEOs, relatively few studies give unequivocal support for pay-for-performance. *"Anyone reading the literature on this subject published 20 years ago would find that the articles look almost identical to those published today."* Herbert Meyer, professor emeritus in the psychology department of the University of Florida, wrote in 1975<sup>2</sup> about the doubts expressed regarding merit pay's efficacy. The same theme was echoed by Alfie Kohn almost 20 years later<sup>3</sup> and others since (we will come to some of them in the second part of the article).

### Alignment to performance

There are some writers, however, who do argue for pay-for-performance. Professor Steve Kaplan, University of Chicago, states *"...there is no doubt that strong company performance is linked to realized pay – the sum of salary, bonus, restricted stock and exercise options. Because most of*

*CEO pay is equity-based...a CEO whose stock price increases substantially will take home a lot, while a CEO whose stock price declines will not."*<sup>4</sup> The focus here is on senior management pay and the notion of aligning pay directly to a clear measure of performance. Others extend the argument to all managers. Professor Michael Jensen takes the view that because budgets and targets encourage managers to cheat and 'game' their systems, *"the only way to solve the problem is to remove all kinks from the pay-for-performance line – to adopt a purely linear bonus schedule... all rewards must be based purely on actual performance"*<sup>5</sup>. Gaming and cheating are arguments that are raised by exponents of both sides of the argument as we will see. Both Kaplan and Jensen build their arguments on the assumption that performance is clearly and accurately measured – in the case of the CEO, by using stock price as the indicator of performance.

### Measurable performance

This critical assumption (the measurability of performance) needs further refining, as argued by Tim Harford in his book *The Logic of Life*<sup>6</sup>. *"When I wrote 'performance pay encourages performance', I was right, but with a crucial hidden premise that performance can be measured."*

This theme is developed further by Pfeffer and Sutton<sup>7</sup> where they identify conditions for financial incentives. They argue that they can drive performance when the task is:

- Independent
- Individual
- Measurable
- Straightforward.

In another study, a meta-analysis in the public sector<sup>8</sup> the authors concluded that pay for performance had a strong positive effect on non-interesting tasks, but a negative effect on performance in the case of interesting tasks.

### The talent argument and the market

Nuno Fernandes of Swiss business school, IMD, takes a different tack. His case includes what is classified as the "talent argument." He writes: *"As the saying goes, if you pay peanuts you get monkeys... we must focus on people's aspirations. We cannot prevent rewarding the best."*<sup>9</sup>

The talent argument is reiterated by Jeff Immelt, CEO of GE. Referring to the threat of "say on pay" legislation requiring shareholders to sanction pay schemes, he says: *"No matter what is decided, I'll work just as hard tomorrow as I work today, but what I have to fight for is the ability to determine how the other 300,000 people in GE are paid"*<sup>10</sup>. This is a sentiment which is commonly expressed by top leaders: they claim that they personally do not need the level of pay nor incentives to accomplish their job; they are simply part of a larger market system to attract and retain talent. Cynics may argue that this is easy to say when you've already reached a top position and enjoy a full package of rewards (financial and non-financial)!

### Joining or staying

A Towers Perrin Global Workforce Study conducted in 2007 amongst 90,000 employees in 18 countries<sup>11</sup>, found that competitive base pay (note: not variable pay specifically) was a key reason people joined firms. However it did not feature in the top ten reasons why they left, nor was it in the top ten reasons for *engagement, motivation or performing the job*.

A 2009 McKinsey Quarterly survey<sup>12</sup> amongst 1,047 executives, managers and employees found that *performance based cash bonuses* ranked fourth in their list of effective motivators (fifth and sixth were *base pay* and *stock/stock options* respectively). The top three were all non-

cash incentives: *praise from immediate managers; leadership attention and chance to lead projects etc.*

This positioning of financial rewards on the list, but not at the top, echoes the findings from a 2004 Watson Wyatt survey<sup>13</sup>, where high performing employees ranked *maintaining a positive reputation* as their primary motivation. *Expecting a significant financial reward* came in at ninth.

## Trust

Another factor relevant to the effectiveness of performance pay is the nature of the relationships within the organisation or team, particularly the degree of trust between people. Where there is a lack of trust it would seem people tend to prefer individual performance rewards.

Kimberley Merriman, assistant professor of management and organisation at Penn State University, studied 49 project teams and the study concluded that where the team had less trust in their colleagues' ability, honesty and dependability, they preferred individualised pay.

In summary, the key issues supporting performance pay appear to be: identifying the conditions best suited to its application (such as straightforward nature of the task; recruitment pressures; independence, measurability etc of the job; low level of trust within the team) and noting that even when it is on the list of expressed motivators, it is often not in the top grouping.

## ARGUMENTS AGAINST

### Short term-ism

One argument levelled against performance pay is short-termism. Alfie Kohn wrote in Harvard Business Review<sup>14</sup>: *“Research suggests that, by and large, rewards*

*succeed at securing one thing only: temporary compliance.”*

Lucian Bebchuk, professor of law, economics and finance and the director of the corporate governance programme at Harvard Law School, reinforces this view<sup>15</sup>: *“Both equity-based and bonus compensation provide executives with substantial rewards for short-term gains. They not only fail to provide desirable long-term incentives but also produce perverse incentives to seek short-term gains even at the expense of long-term performance...”*

### Individual, team or fortune

Professor Bebchuk continues: *“...in addition, both equity-based and bonus arrangements reward executives for gains that are due not to their own performance but to economy- or industry-wide movements.”*

This is another key aspect of performance pay that merits consideration – the extent to which the performance in question is based on an individual's achievements as opposed to collective work or wider reasons. Matt Bloom writing in the *Academy of Management Journal*<sup>16</sup> reports that *“virtually all of the research in support of hierarchical distribution has sampled work in which only individual performance matters.”*

A Finnish study<sup>17</sup> found that team-based rewards helped boost productivity – by between 9 and 20% – in three out of the four groups studied, providing the existing team culture and organisation structure were positive. They interpreted their findings as capturing the joint effect of teams and performance pay on efficiency and that teams helped to maintain peer monitoring to prevent free-riding. They suggested that if performance pay had been introduced to the previous hierarchical regime, they felt that the performance gains were unlikely to have been achieved.

The need to adapt systems to the organisation's culture was behind a study of a pay for performance scheme introduced and then abandoned in Hewlett Packard<sup>18</sup>. Harvard's Michael Beer wrote: *"HP's culture is one that historically placed more emphasis on management that builds commitment rather than on monetary incentives. Clearly they would be more prone to abandon programs that threatened trust and commitment."* Note the link to trust as previously mentioned.

### Performance and the talent myth

*"The talent myth assumes that people make organizations smart. More often than not, it's the other way round"* wrote Malcolm Gladwell in the *New Yorker* in 2002<sup>19</sup>. In it he recounts a project at McKinsey & Co in the late 1990s<sup>20</sup>. The project examined how to single out and reward stars, based on the McKinsey philosophy that talent is what ultimately determines success and failure in the corporate world. A company that embraced the McKinsey advice more vigorously than others was Enron. Gladwell wrote: *"The broader failing of McKinsey and its acolytes at Enron is their assumption that an organization's intelligence is simply a function of its employees. They believe in stars, because they don't believe in systems."*

In his book *Chasing Stars*<sup>21</sup> Boris Groysberg describes the analysis of over 1,000 star analysts at 78 investment banks, and 20,000 non-star analysts at 400 investment banks. His findings were that "mobile" stars experienced immediate degradation in performance that lasted at least five years. Thus, performance may be more firm-specific than one might think.

### Differentials

Opting more for individual performance pay rather than the collective leads us to consider the impact of pay dispersal on

performance. A study<sup>22</sup> implied that people were more concerned with their relative pay than the absolute level – in fact the results suggested that they would accept a lower sum than otherwise if it avoided being **relatively** underpaid.

Pfeffer and Sutton<sup>23</sup> summarised a study of 67 companies<sup>24</sup> which discovered that those with the greatest difference between worst and best paid executives had the weakest financial performance in terms of Total Shareholder Return (TSR). Another study found that the greater the gap between top management and employee pay, the lower the product quality<sup>25</sup>.

Matt Bloom in his study of baseball and the impact of hierarchy on player and franchise performance<sup>26</sup> concluded that *"...attracting stars creates a more hierarchical pay distribution, which may reduce individual and organisational performance."*

### Performance goals

The effect of goals, in general, is challenged in *Goals Gone Wild*<sup>27</sup>. In it the authors argue *"...that the beneficial effects of goal setting have been overstated and that systematic harm caused by goal setting has been largely ignored."* They describe side effects such as narrow focus, unethical behaviour, distorted risk preferences, corrosion of organisational culture and reduced intrinsic motivation. They ask whether goals are *"..benign over-the-counter treatment for motivation... [or] prescription-strength medication that requires careful dosing, consideration of harmful side effects and close supervision."*

Financial reporting of performance, which by its nature is based on accounting judgements and subjective valuations, can be tempting to those looking to manipulate their achievements. A study by the University of Minnesota<sup>28</sup> compared over 400 companies that had to restate their

financial statements with those that did not and found that the higher the proportion of senior executives' pay was in stock options, the more likely the company was to have had to restate its results. Another study concluded that incentive pay packets can *"create an environment that ultimately leads to fraud."*<sup>29</sup>

Stronger language came from Henry Mintzberg writing in the *Wall Street Journal* in November 2009<sup>30</sup>: *"Executive bonuses – especially in the form of stock and option grants – represent the most prominent form of legal corruption that has been undermining our large corporations and bringing down the global economy."*

### Intrinsic motivation

Many studies note the relationship between rewards and intrinsic motivation. Alfie Kohn wrote<sup>31</sup> *"...studies ... have conclusively shown that people who expect to receive a reward for completing a task or for doing that task successfully simply do not perform as well as those who expect no reward at all."*

In fact, an analysis of three decades of studies<sup>32,33</sup> concluded that *"tangible rewards tend to have a negative effect on intrinsic motivation."*

In summary, the key arguments against performance pay are that: it secures only temporary compliance; it may be more suited to team rather than individual rewards and is less suited to collaborative and trusting cultures; talent is not as independent from the organisation and transferable as many believe; it can create damaging differentials; and some believe it can lead to unethical behaviour. Studies reinforce the evidence that reward systems often reduce motivation, do not work in creative and cognitive contexts and in many situations cause performance to fall.

## Conclusion

The overall balance of the evidence is that pay for performance schemes work in fewer situations than many people think. Line managers and HR professionals should consider some of the pointers from the evidence before agreeing to its use in their organisations.

1. Shared or team rewards might be more productive than individual ones. The evidence suggests that company or team rewards work better than individual ones providing that there is a collaborative and trusting culture supporting the initiative. If that culture does not exist, maybe that should be where management and HR should direct their focus, rather than a potentially divisive pay scheme.
2. Financial rewards seem to work best for non-interesting, mechanical tasks, not complex ones requiring cognitive, creative skills. How many jobs, particularly for the manager population, could be clearly categorised as individual, independent, straightforward, measurable, simple and effort-based rather than complex, requiring cognitive and creative skills, based on a blend of judgement and measurement?
3. The evidence suggests that performance pay creates a market or transactional mindset and this may undermine other management styles/cultures. Introducing a performance pay scheme may reduce people's intrinsic motivation, make them more narrow, short-termist and transactional, and may cause performance to fall.

In the face of such evidence the question is raised as to why so many managers deploy pay for performance so readily – and whether it is really used as an inferior substitute for effective leadership?

## Experiments

Dan Ariely describes some of his team's experiments in his book *Predictably Irrational*<sup>34</sup>. A straightforward task where subjects were asked to drag shapes into target areas on a computer was the context. The aim was to drag as many as possible in a given time. When the first group were paid 50c (in total) the average number of shapes dragged came to 101. Those on a higher fee (\$5) successfully achieved 159. It would seem from this simplest of studies that if you pay more, you get more.

There was, however, a third group. They were just asked... with no payment! They achieved 168. Ariely distinguishes between two worlds: the market and the social world and raises the question of how performance may be affected by framing tasks in a transactional, market context rather than a more social one. In another experiment his team replaced payment with gifts (more social than market) and achieved similar higher levels of performance where no gifts were involved at all.

In *The Upside of Irrationality*<sup>35</sup> Ariely shares another set of experiments conducted with fellow researchers Uri Gneezy, George Loewenstein and Nina Mazar in India. Subjects were offered low, medium or high rewards for a range of tasks demanding attention, memory, concentration and creativity. There was little difference in the performance of the groups offered low or medium payments. Those offered the high bonus (and by running the experiment in India they were able to make the bonus significant in local currency terms) performed worse than the others in every task.

They repeated the experiments with groups at MIT and a subtle difference emerged. With mechanical tasks more pay resulted in higher performance, but those that required cognitive skills showed the same result as in India: higher pay meant lower performance. Experiments by Sam Glucksberg (Princeton) and Teresa Ambile (Harvard) suggest creativity can also suffer under reward systems.

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## Mindful leadership: Exploring the value of a meditation practice

The practice of meditation in the business world is increasingly moving from the fringe to the mainstream, and already features as a key part of a number of international management and organisation development programmes. Emma Dolman and Dave Bond review the impact that meditation practices have made, and report on a meditation research study conducted at Ashridge.

## 'Mindfulness' in management education

For some years now, various forms of the 'mindfulness' construct have been part of thinking about business, leadership and learning<sup>1,2</sup>. Isaacs<sup>3</sup> has drawn on a range of work exploring this terrain. From one example, she refers to Waddock's argument for the place of mindfulness in management education, where mindfulness is described as

*...the capacity to be in the present moment, aware of what is happening now, and mindfulness practices, particularly meditation, can arguably help move individuals along the development ladder. Mindfulness is based on self-awareness and full presence of the sort that includes not just the mind, but also the emotions, creativity, soulfulness and spirit.*<sup>4</sup>

Exploring the work of learning more broadly, Langer and Moldoveanu<sup>5</sup> adopt a social psychology perspective to describe mindfulness as a state of active awareness which enables the continual creation and refinement of categories in a given situation – an important component of learning. This capability includes paying attention in the given moment, being aware of the environment and of others' perspectives and an openness to new information. Mindlessness, on the other hand, is the inability to move out of automatic responses or to read new signals which would require new ways of thinking and behaving. An example of mindlessness from this perspective might be the COO of a construction company's insistence on established supply chain management and 'cost effectiveness' in the face of emerging sentiment and regulation requiring increased sensitivity to environmental impact. In this sense, it can be seen that mindfulness has a crucial role to play in enhancing our capacity to lead in contexts of uncertainty and change.

## Practical application

Although still seen as somewhat fringe or 'whacky' by some, mindfulness has been well-developed in systematic ways for practical application. Diverse organisations and businesses are now considering it as a legitimate practice, as well as those involved in management, organisation and leadership development. Karl Weick, for example, has used the construct of mindfulness to focus on organisation development. He and colleagues<sup>6</sup> argue that organisations tend to overestimate the extent to which what they face is well structured, clear and predictable. So, Weick and Sutcliffe have developed a systematic process for auditing organisational mindfulness – the organisation's capacity to operate in dynamic, ill-structured, ambiguous and unpredictable circumstances. This audit explores five main concerns: a preoccupation with failure, reluctance to simplify, sensitivity to operations, commitment to resilience, and deference to expertise.

They were developing this work in the early 1990s and cite, as one example which prompted their focus, the rapid sinking of the car ferry *The Herald of Free Enterprise* in the late 1980s. This disaster cost almost 200 lives, despite the captain having followed 'standing orders'. They claim that the kind of mindfulness they argue for is a vital component for organisations to remain reliable in the face of constant exposure to crisis and change.

Similarly, John Mason<sup>7</sup> has built on years of research into education in mathematics to make a persuasive case for research and professional development as 'the discipline of noticing'. He argues that *"attention to noticing turns studies focused on other people and situations into studies which learn about other people and situations through learning about oneself ... the central focus of noticing, which is to be mindful, to be awake in the moment... so as to participate*

*in an increasingly rich and productive range of options at any given moment."* Mason's rigorous and systematic academic approach to mindfulness as a basis for self-understanding and development is similar to the notions popularised through the recent work of writers such as Boyatzis and McKee<sup>8</sup>; Goleman and Kabat-Zinn<sup>9</sup>; Scharmer<sup>10</sup>; and their colleagues.

## Proven benefits

More or less explicitly, this range of work draws on a wide range of meditation practices more often associated with religion, mysticism, and the contemplative traditions. Whilst the strength of these can be their long-established provenance in contemplative practices, this can also generate opposition and resistance if overly associated with one or other religious or spiritual tradition. Jon Kabat-Zinn<sup>11</sup> and colleagues have made considerable inroads here, by basing their work on academic research, working hand-in-hand with the health sciences. Similarly to Waddock above, Kabat-Zinn sees mindfulness as the intentional cultivation of moment to moment awareness without judgment. Kabat-Zinn's work has become established in many medical practices, including the medical faculties of the Duke, Harvard and Massachusetts Universities in the USA and amongst health professionals in the UK<sup>12</sup>. Whilst meditation has long been associated with stress reduction and the treatment of depression, it is increasingly being recognised as important in developing the type of cognitive capacities required of knowledge workers in the modern economy.

The business world has, in part, been won over by findings at the American Institute of Health, the University of Massachusetts, and the Mind/Body Medical Institute at Harvard University. These evidence-based

studies have cited the following as specific benefits of meditation for businesses:

- Reduced costs of staff absenteeism caused by illness, injury, stress
- Improved cognitive function – including better concentration, memory, learning ability and creativity
- Improved productivity and improved overall staff and business wellbeing
- Reduced staff turnover and associated costs
- Enhanced employer/employee and client relationships
- Reduced health insurance premiums for the business
- A visible and tangible corporate responsibility stance
- Enhanced employee job satisfaction<sup>13</sup>.

Additionally, the recent 'Response' study<sup>14</sup>, led by Insead, found that meditation-based coaching had both a statistically significant impact on socially responsible behaviour and an impact on three factors they had identified as influencing the social consciousness of managers. This was in marked contrast to standard executive education approaches.

Meditation is now being taken more seriously, and features as a key part of a number of business courses. There are increasing examples of the use of various forms of meditative practice in international management and leadership development. One such example can be found in the Executive MBA (EMBA) programme of the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of Business. Over ten years ago, senior Zen Buddhist teachers were already running introductory sessions on mindfulness as part of the personal leadership component of this EMBA programme. More recently, the programme has introduced a full mindfulness course, based on the work of Kabat-Zinn, and includes regular times for meditation in its schedule. Not surprisingly, Isaacs<sup>15</sup> found a range of responses in her

study of responses to the incorporation of 'mindfulness' in this EMBA programme. These traversed the range from objection or scepticism, to open-mindedness and those who were incorporating it into their daily routine. A number cited the benefits associated with: being present, awareness, non-judgmental attention to the present moment, self-awareness, focused attention to the present moment, awareness of other perspectives and fostering empathy. The study also found a significant inter-relationship between mindfulness, stress management, decision-making and risk taking. In one example, the CEO of a small software company described improved negotiation results and supplier relationships resulting from slowing down responses and being more mindful of options and approaches.

### Research study at Ashridge

While Ashridge has for a number of years had its own room dedicated to silence and meditation, this is a relatively new area of its research. We therefore set out to lay the basis for a deeper understanding of the value and limitations of meditative practice for employees, and, where appropriate, to feed these findings into the ongoing innovation of what Ashridge has to offer its clients. The purpose of our research project was to try to identify the benefit – if any – of an individual meditating consistently over a 45-day period. If positive benefits were found, then Ashridge would be ideally placed to introduce meditation into its own practice with clients more explicitly.

### Design/methodology/approach

For the purpose of this research, we chose what is known as Samarpan meditation. It is a simple meditation technique and is not attached to any religion. It can be practised by anyone of any age or background, and

requires no prior experience of meditation. Samarpan is translated as 'to let go' or 'to surrender' (thoughts, emotions, situations). The aim of the meditation is to reach a state where the mind is quietened and there are no thoughts. This enables those meditating to connect to a state from where they can derive more energy. It increases feelings of calmness and relaxation, and makes the practitioner feel that life is more balanced. Paradoxically, this is also a state that allows for a sharper awareness of what is actually 'going on'.

Although this is a 'new' technique from the Himalayas, it has ancient origins. The meditation is based on a mantra which has been handed down over 800 years from teacher to only one pupil within the Himalayas. In 2000, Swami Shivkrupananda emerged from the Himalayas with the wish to teach it to anyone who wished to learn it and in just ten years it has spread around the globe and currently is being practised by over 500,000 people.

Acknowledging that there is a growing body of research exploring the link between meditation and the health sciences<sup>16,17,18</sup>, we chose to focus this pilot research on subjective research measures supported by psychological measures. Advice from the Nuffield Health Foundation supported this more subjective approach. We used a reflective journal to capture the results of simple tests related to perceived benefits. Undertaking reflective journaling for an extended period of time focuses the practitioner on the sense of an ongoing journey and allows them to record their mental state and energy levels. This journal was somewhere to record thoughts, feelings, emotions and progress, and any additional events affecting the individual, regarding all aspects of their life and experiences.

In order for the methodology to be robust three groups were created as outlined here:

**Group 1** were asked to meditate using the prescribed technique for 45 days, and to undertake some psychometric tests. They were asked to keep a journal for the duration of the research, as well as completing a 'Life Wheel' every two weeks to indicate satisfaction with different areas of their lives.

**Group 2** were asked to take 30 minutes out of their day for 45 days and undertake an activity that they were not used to doing, but one that involves very little higher cognitive activity, e.g., walking, having a bath, knitting, etc.

**Group 3** were the control group, who were asked not to undertake any activity different from their everyday life, but who completed all of the Group 1 psychometrics at the appropriate times.

Participation was sought from volunteers across the broad Ashridge community, including staff, associates, alumni, friends, and family. All the groups were fully briefed on their participation. Groups 1 and 2 had additional briefing and received a pack containing a journal and all the test material. The journals also set out clearly the process of what needed to be completed, by when, over the 45-day period.

## Research tests

The research tests that were selected were:

The **IPIP** – a personality test to examine trends in personality of those attracted to the experiment.

**Epworth sleep scale** – to measure sleepiness.

**Stanford sleep scale** – to measure alertness.

**General health questionnaire** – to provide a general impression of overall health.

**Mindful attention awareness scale** – to measure a disposition of mindfulness – being open to what is happening in the present.

**The journal** – to keep a log of progress and any significant events, and for writing personal reflections.

**Life wheel** – to measure satisfaction in 12 areas of life: relationships with partner, family, friends and at work, home, finance, health, work/career, free time, personal development, self esteem, and contentment (Fig 1).

### Scale

This scale illustrates the range. Choose any number 1-10 guided by these indicators.

- 1 very unsatisfied
- 5 neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- 10 very satisfied

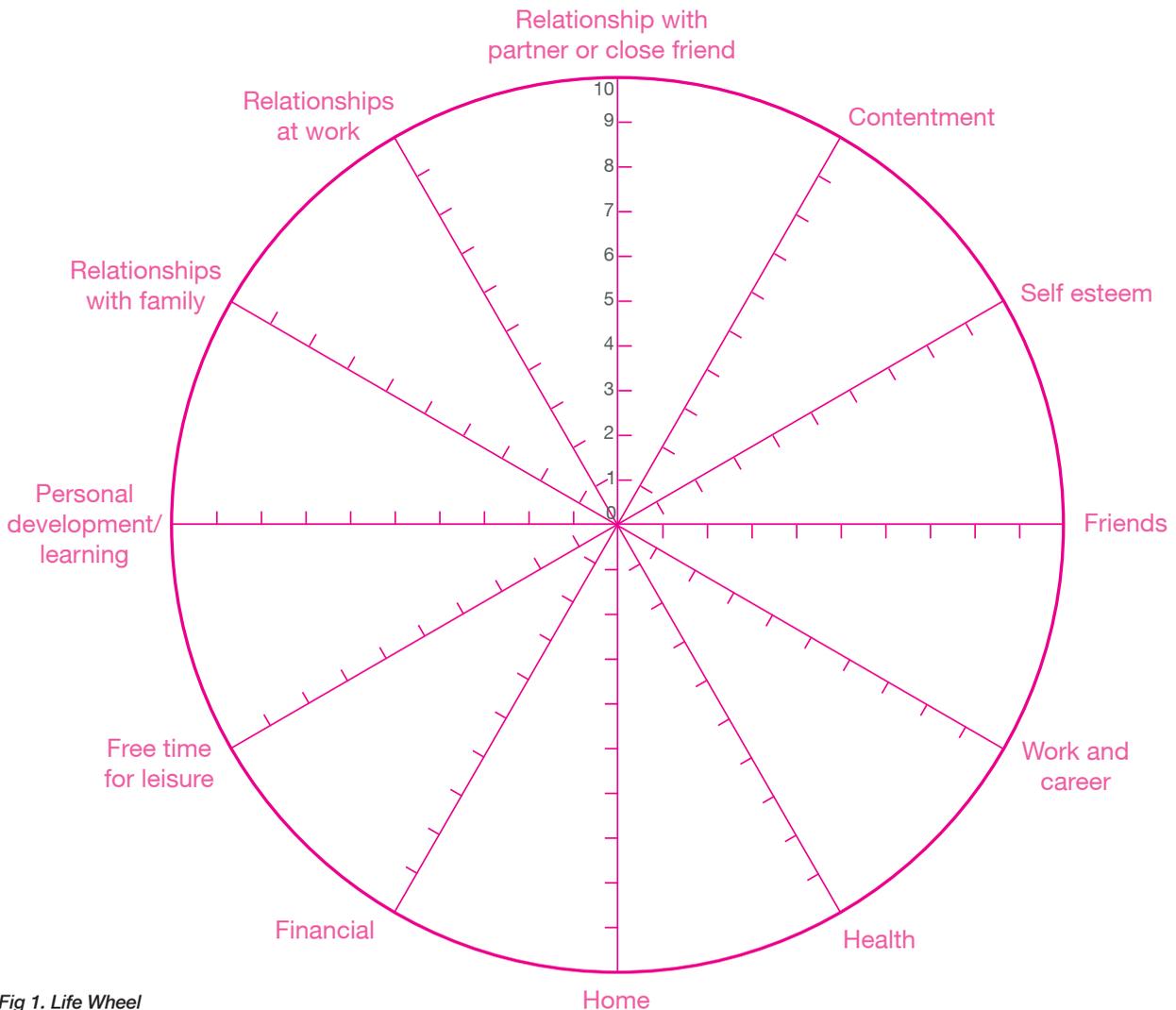


Fig 1. Life Wheel

## Research participants

### Group 1

There were initially 45 people interested in meditating. Of these, 8 did not start for various reasons, 4 started briefly but stopped and submitted little data, and 2 meditated for a short period but had to be excluded as they did not follow the meditation and research guidelines. This left a core meditation group of 32 – consisting of 27 females (84%) and 5 males (16%). Within this group, 53% had meditated before and 47% were new to meditation.

### Group 2

There were initially 25 participants. 3 did not start or submit any data and 5 others did not submit all the data or dropped out. The final participant group included 9 males (41%) and 13 females (59%).

### Group 3

There were 20 participants in the control group, of this group 80% were female and 20% male. There was one female who dropped out early on in the process.

## Findings

### Summary of activity

Group 1 undertook a total number of 1013 meditation sessions, averaging 33 days of meditation per person. In Group 2, 16 participants showed a total of 486 days when activities were completed, providing an average of 30 activity days per person. In both cases this represented a significant commitment of 30 minutes per person per activity day. Of the meditating group, 53% had meditated previously, while 47% had not.

### Benefits

For Group 1, a remarkable 90% noted benefits from having participated in the

meditation process. Group 1 participants were asked to prioritise the benefits they found. Interestingly, out of all the benefits listed, 61% noted 'feeling of calm', 30% listed 'enjoyed leaving everything and having time to themselves'. 22% of the items listed related to improved sleep, and 22% also cited 'having a different perspective'. Other benefits included: feeling relaxed, feeling refreshed, being part of a group, improved general wellbeing, feeling peaceful, worrying less, and having clearer thoughts. The group also welcomed the opportunity afforded by the research process to reflect after the 45-day period. This gave a different perspective and helped set the 'journey' into perspective. By comparison, only 52% of Group 2 noted beneficial value from their self-chosen non-meditation activities.

### Findings from the journals

Both groups captured their journey by journalling, which provides a rich seam of material. Personal experience and informal research by one of the authors suggests that, when starting meditation with the Samarpan method, a participant is likely to feel heat or tingling in the body as negativity is released. Over time, they are likely to feel more relaxed, calm and peaceful, with a clearer mind.

Therefore, the Group 1 journals were analysed for these key words. (For the purpose of this article, only some features have been highlighted. There is a rich pool of data which will be explored in more detail in forthcoming articles.)

Therefore, the Group 1 journals were analysed for these key words. This analysis showed that 55% of Group 1 participants felt heat in their body at some point, 45% felt tingling in some part of their body, 71% noted that they felt calmer, 64% felt more relaxed, 42% felt peaceful and 26% had clearer thoughts.

To strengthen the meditation experience, participants were also offered the opportunity to meditate collectively for one session a week. It was not possible for all participants due to either their location or their work commitments. However, from comments in the journals, 68% of the group noted that they felt their meditation experience was much stronger when meditating together. Indeed this helped bond the group, forming it as a community where each workday someone would be meditating at lunchtime.

### Life wheels

Findings from the life wheels are intriguing. These wheels divided up an individual's life into the 12 areas outlined above, and participants scored their level of satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 10 fortnightly during the 45 days. The meditating group saw a statistically significant increase in satisfaction with contentment, self-esteem, home, health, financial, relationship with partner, relationship with friends, relationships with family before and after introducing meditation to their lives. Thus, 67% of factors showed a significant positive change.

### Barriers to activity

The barriers for the meditators were reasonably predictable and included: lack of time, family commitments, business commitments, being away on holiday, and interruptions. It is interesting that in the meditating group 52% of participants had critical incidents during their 45 days which would have added more pressure, for example finding out that a relative had cancer, moving house, losing a job, domestic problems, etc. Despite the high level of potentially stressful factors, Group 1 participants still noted significantly higher levels of benefit than Group 2 or the control group.

## An external perspective

We asked participants in Groups 1 and 2 to ask someone close to them to observe them over the 45 days, to see if there were any noticeable changes. In Group 1 there were over 13 different changes noticed, as opposed to just a couple of remarks for Group 2. In Group 1, 16 people had sought feedback, with the most popular change observed being an increase in calmness. Other noticeable changes included; 'husband said I am happier', 'going with the flow'; 'more energy', 'a noticeable change in temperament', 'more tolerant', 'now easier to be with', 'have a positive outlook now', 'more tranquil energy', 'more open and communicates better emotions and feelings' and 'deals with change better'.

## Participation in the future

Asked if they would continue, 76% of Group 1 said they wished to continue meditating, which included some who had not completed the 45 days this time. 71% said that they would continue to attend the Ashridge meditation group and 56% said that they would be happy to do the 45 days again. Of those who were going to continue meditating, 68% were happy for there to be some follow up to this research in six months' time. Asked whether they would continue with meditation as a practice, 48% said they would, and, of these, 43% agreed to follow-up research in six months' time.

## Participant remarks

Much of the richness in the data is in the participants' own voices and words. Here are some illustrative quotes:

Group 1: *"I think this should be part of everyone's day"; "Wonderful – the start of something important in my life"; "I think the ability to meditate is an important element*

*in the reflection time needed to survive in today's turbulent world"; "Thank you for passing on this knowledge and experience, I feel very blessed and will certainly recommend it to other people".*

Group 2: *"I came along just to observe and then signed up and I am glad I did – I really enjoyed it"; "I can certainly see the value of having something routine to do around relaxation"; "Sometimes switching the brain off, day-dreaming, allows things to come up which alert you to unforeseen dangers or opportunities that in the business world would get overlooked".*

## Conclusion

These preliminary findings suggest a significantly upwards shift in general levels of satisfaction for individuals who commit to a period of meditation. This is a promising finding in relation to an exploration of the beneficial impact of meditation for the workplace. These findings are indicative, and can now be investigated in more depth. Our study provides early indications to support existing work in this field, which incorporates mindfulness and meditation in leadership development and sustainability. What lies ahead, over and above the more detailed analysis of the data in this project, is a range of opportunities to experiment with and explore diverse meditation and mindfulness practices in the context of client work. The value of this research lies in a number of areas. First, it makes a contribution to the growing body of research on mindfulness and its importance for organisations. Second, it helps to inform public perception of meditative practices through articles for magazines and newspapers. Third, it helps to support the collective endeavour by Ashridge faculty and consultants to develop a range of innovative and impactful offerings in the service of our clients. In particular, meditation can help those of our clients who grapple with the considerable

stress of providing sound and sustainable leadership by helping them ground it in conscious awareness of the complexity of the working context.

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To view podcasts of Emma Dolman discussing aspects of meditation research, please visit [www.ashridge.org.uk/research/meditation](http://www.ashridge.org.uk/research/meditation)

More material on meditation will shortly be added to the Ashridge Virtual Learning Research Centre.

Please visit [www.ashridge.org.uk/vlrc](http://www.ashridge.org.uk/vlrc)

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See also [www.samarpanmeditation.org](http://www.samarpanmeditation.org)



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## Neuroscience, learning and change

Modern technology has revealed many of the secrets of the geography of our brains and the functions of its different areas. Kai Peters summarises the latest developments in neuroscience, and suggests how the findings can be used in designing learning interventions in executive education.

Early brain research must have been fascinating in a macabre sort of way. Serious head injuries were much prized, as long as the victim did not die immediately. Bullets, lodged iron bars, and other random bits of metal would destroy various segments of the brain, and doctors would excitedly see what still worked and what did not. Was memory affected? Did behaviour change? Was language affected? Was learning still possible?

Over time, science matured, but the principles remained the same. Brain surgery became possible. In the 1950s, electrodes were used to stimulate the brain. Maps were created linking parts of the brain to related body parts and mental functions. Perhaps unsurprisingly, finding volunteers who wanted electrodes shoved into their brains was a challenge and new methods were developed. Today, OIS (optical imaging of intrinsic signals), where cameras track blood flow around the brain, is used on the rare occasions when the brain is exposed. A less precise, but non-invasive procedure is fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging). Using MRI machines has allowed researchers to study what happens in the brain when a variety of tasks are performed: moving a finger, confronting a dilemma, comparing Coke and Pepsi and even having an orgasm. (Bet that got your attention!).

## Structure of the brain

As James Shreeve colourfully describes it, your brain is “a 1.5 kg bolus of fat and protein, wrinkled like a cleaning sponge and with the consistency of curdled milk”. The brain is made of two fundamental parts. The **limbic** system, which is the older, more primitive, brain and the seat of emotion – the fight or flight centre. The **cerebral cortex** is the thinking area surrounding the limbic system where language, learning, memory and judgement reside. As an aside, there are also significant numbers of nerve cells, or neurons, in your heart and in your

stomach which interact with your brain. If someone talks about a “good gut feeling”, it really is true!

The brain is an electro-chemical wonder. Weeks after conception, half a million neurons are produced every minute leading ultimately to about 100 billion neurons in your brain. In the first and second trimester, these neurons reach out to each other to create points of contact called synapses. These synapses, which are created at the rate of 2 million connections a second during this period of gestation, can perhaps be metaphorically seen as the pathways of connection. Over time, some of these pathways get used regularly and turn into roads or even highways. Others, never used, grass over and disappear. At birth, for example, all children have the neural capacity to hear and pronounce all of the sounds in all languages yet they only maintain those that get properly developed while the others fade away. During the first 18 months of life, the brain is an information sponge. Stimulation creates strong synaptic connections. Non use leads to atrophy. In learning terms this is critical. Children who are not mentally stimulated at an early age will not be able to develop as well as children who do. Intelligence, which is theoretically equal at birth, is defined by how the brain is developed by one’s surrounding. If children are not played with, read to and attended to, neuroscience has shown that they will fall behind.

At age 2, the prefrontal cortex comes on line and with it comes a conception of space, language and thought. Interestingly, the last part of the “thinking” brain which develops is the part of the cortex which is responsible for social judgements, for weighing alternatives, planning for the future and for managing behaviour. This only occurs at the age of about 25. If you had always wondered about what was going on in teenagers’ heads – their judgement really is not all that developed and there is nothing that one can do about it!

While the historical view had been that specific functions were contained in certain areas of the brain, modern research has shown that brains are much more nuanced. Functions are indeed weighted to general areas, but the brain is plastic and movement can occur. Parts of the brain can grow or shrink and even areas which are injured can have their tasks partially shifted to neighbouring zones.

So over time, your brain has developed a certain set of synapse connections and a knowledge and behaviour repertoire. When something new comes along, you have somato-sensors in your brain which receive input from your senses of hearing, vision, touch, taste and smell. Impulses from the somato-sensors are processed in the hippocampus which compares incoming information with stored knowledge. The limbic system also adds emotional signifiers to this information. If the new input is judged to be positive, the hippocampus sends a pulse of dopamine which is both pleasant and stimulates memory. It also promotes the release of acetylcholinem which increases attention. If, however, the new impulse is judged to be bad or an overload, your amygdala, part of the emotional limbic system, blocks up and creates a sense of anxiety or panic. This amygdala hijack actually draws energy away from your cognitive prefrontal cortex, causing you to think less.

While some of this may seem rather abstract, it is nonetheless fascinating when applied to learning and change which are, in effect, the same from a neuroscientific perspective. Most of the time, you are on autopilot. Driving the same way to work everyday does not require thinking. Performing similar work tasks regularly is equally unstimulating. Something really new, however, requires brain processing and this takes real energy. It is, in effect, tiring.

## Neuroscience and learning

Brain research is an emerging field. Ninety percent of brain research is less than ten years old. Almost all of the brain research which has been conducted in relation to learning and education has focused on early childhood education. That said, real lessons for adult learning are emerging. If, as noted earlier, positive inputs release dopamine and create a virtual cycle of positive feeling and memory activation, creating a happy learning environment genuinely makes a difference. More fascinating is to think about novelty. Good novelty reinforces the positive. Bad novelty which induces an amygdala hijack or boredom actually works against learning.

In designing learning interventions, there are numerous lessons here. First, think of something novel that enlivens the learning. Do something fun and unexpected and participant learning will increase. Do something which participants do not like, or find boring, and you will have neurologically lost them. In a traditional classroom, this would mean that it is critical to teach new and interesting material first and not review last week's lesson again for reinforcement. In executive education, where simulations are used, be sure to use a believable, relevant activity.

Neurons and synapses are also critical to learning. The new needs to create new synaptic paths. Walking metaphorically through the bush is simply not enough to create a new path, never mind a new highway. Repetition and reinforcement are necessary. New information needs to progress from working memory into stored memory. If something is not reinforced, it does not make this journey. If you have ever wondered why you cannot remember someone's name when you have been introduced, it is because you have not repeated it to yourself several times and it has simply disappeared from your working memory. Through knowledge, your brain

can actually grow. London cabbies, having had to learn "The Knowledge" of 25,000 streets in Central London and important ones beyond, have an enlarged rear hippocampus. Blind people have an enlarged somato-sensory cortex where spatial senses which would have been provided entirely through sight, are replaced by spatial abilities developed through hearing, sound and feeling. This process would begin in anyone who is blind-folded for more than a few hours but would disappear once the blindfold is removed.

Learning to do something differently is a far greater challenge than simply having to learn something new. You already have a developed synaptic superhighway which causes certain types of knowledge analysis and behavioural reaction. The longer one has reinforced this particular world-view, whether correct or not, the harder it is to alter. A brand new path needs to be created, cultivated and developed so that it becomes the new highway and the old one grows over. This can be accomplished through really hard work, but it is indeed hard to teach an old dog different tricks. Research has been conducted looking at the brains of different functional roles. As will be apparent, accountants really do have different brains than marketing people do. Getting them to see eye-to-eye requires some real neurological development.

## Neuroscience and change

As with learning to do something differently rather than learning to do something new, so too with change. When one speaks about change, what one is really looking for is behavioural change. Behaviour is even more deeply embedded than is cognition and is almost guaranteed to create an amygdala hijack with the related physiological discomfort. Ironically, people with more experience in a variety of settings tend to react better to change than those with a more limited experience set.

Younger colleagues who have only known one reality can find change very tough.

In looking at the neuroscience of change, what one is in effect doing is throwing a hard science at the field of psychology and testing the assumptions. Many prove to be incorrect. Thinking about one's mistakes, for instance, simply reinforces the bad experiences rather than allowing you to move on. It is much better to use positive psychology to focus on what went right rather than on what went wrong. Appreciative Inquiry events are thus a very sensible approach to large group events.

As with behaviourism, a humanistic approach is problematic as one is in effect telling people to change in a nice manner.

From the neuroscience of education, we have seen that attention and focus are necessary to create an environment in which neurological development can happen. Repetition and reinforcement, in a positive way, are critical for new behaviours to develop. We all, however, have a limited capacity to pay attention. Working memory is limited and novelty must be embedded. Shorter, regular discussions are much more useful than multi-day marathons. If longer periods of concentration are needed because of scheduling requirements, then breaking the day up with other activities actually stimulates the brain, which continues to work in the background, rather than turning the brain off.

Change must be owned. If a group is presented with the goals and how to get there, the natural neurological reaction is one of rejection. If, instead, the goals are presented and constraints are given but the path can be chosen by participants, successful outcomes are much more likely. If as a manager, you can paint a positive picture of a strived for future, and ask colleagues for help in getting there, the ideas they generate lead to positive dopamine release. Avoiding long discussions about

problems is also critical. A recent study, interestingly, has used MRI scanning on people with positive and negative outlooks. It is actually possible to identify glass-half-empty people through a brain scan which reveals that the more electro-chemical activity that happens on the left side rather than on the right side of the prefrontal cortex, the more positive you are. The study also showed that meditation moved activity to the left – at least for the monks who participated.

### Neuroscience in the real world

Neuroscientific principles are already being actively applied in real settings. Positive psychology, visualisation, repetition and taking charge of the challenges are all key components of the US Army Center for Enhanced Performance at West Point, a centre based on cognition, neuroscience and health. It is a fascinating and emerging field which will become increasingly central to learning and change.

### Further reading

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