

NIACE Research and Development



Key Findings



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Developing multi-level leadership in Adult and Community Learning

Abstract

The primary purpose of the research project was to explore the approach to leadership development at multiple levels espoused and operated by a highly successful local authority adult and community learning (ACL) provider organisation, Lancashire Adult Learning. The project aimed to generate relevant findings to assist the organisation in taking forward its leadership development strategy, and to inform other providers in the ACL sub-sector of the Learning and Skills Sector (LSS).

The research considered how leadership at strategic and operational management levels, and in particular at the level of leaders of teachers/curriculum areas, can best be developed and supported; what conceptualisations of leadership are helpful/unhelpful; how training and development needs are identified and addressed; how internal and external training interventions contribute to leadership development; and what factors in organisational climate and culture are significant in enabling/inhibiting leadership development.

Research methodology:

- ❖ Research activities comprised the analysis of background information/relevant documentation; individual semi-structured interviews with the local authority lead officer and strategic senior managers; a survey of operational managers; focus groups with middle managers; observation of management meetings; meetings with strategic and operational managers not participating in other aspects of the research. Analysis was against the following themes: organisational culture and structure; mechanisms and processes for enacting leadership and management; organisational and individual expectations and perceived requirements relating to leadership; training and development; internal and external influences on leadership development. The approach adopted was predominantly qualitative and located within an ethnographic paradigm.

Key Findings

The main conclusions of the project are:

- ❖ Lancashire Adult Learning aims to develop 'informed and effective leadership' throughout the service. Respondents consider this to be genuine. LAL's concept of leadership development encompasses individuals' attitudes, skills and abilities, and the development of leadership as a collective endeavour, a way of being. In this latter sense the development of leadership depends on culture and ethos, "embedded in the social capital of the organisation through commitment, trust and respect underpinning inter-personal and intra-personal relationships leading via cognitive development to a set of values".
- ❖ LAL's approach to leadership is essentially transformational rather than contractual. Necessary pragmatism is tempered by a humanistic and people-centred culture. This culture has been deliberately established and cultivated and is reinforced through the manner in which leadership is enacted at all levels. The leadership development strategy is emergent rather than prescribed.
- ❖ Findings suggest that the service's culture and values both foster and support professional and personal development, and in the broadest sense 'learning'. This is most likely to occur as a result of reflection on experience, in an atmosphere that values people and eschews blaming.

Recommendations

That the service considers the benefits of:

- ❖ Articulating a more explicit service leadership development strategy.
- ❖ Encouraging individuals and their line managers explicitly to reflect on leadership practices and relevant professional development prior to and during Professional Development Reviews.
- ❖ Establishing a cross-service leadership development forum.
- ❖ Creating an in-house leadership and management development programme.

Output

- ❖ Interim and final project reports submitted to University of Lancaster/CEL.
- ❖ Final report will appear on CEL website in due course.

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Requests for 'Key Findings' in other formats, such as large print, are welcome. We would be pleased to consider your request.

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