ABSTRACT

This paper explores the differences between two categories of in-company management development programme: those that offer participants a nationally recognised qualification and those that are not assessed. The argument is made that certificating a programme will lead to different forms of experience and outcome for the participants and for the organization. We believe that it is important for clients and providers to be aware of these differences when engaged in selecting, planning and running a management development programme if maximum benefit from the investment is to be gained. A tentative contingency theory is outlined in the Summary.

KEYWORDS
Management Development, Qualification, Evaluation, Strategy

INTRODUCTION

The authors are Management Development practitioners at Bristol Business School, University of the West of England, Bristol, UK. The research outlined in this article has involved an extensive evaluation of six management development programmes run in partnership with client organizations of the Business School. A comparison is made between those programmes that offer a qualification and those that are not assessed. It is argued that attaching a qualification to a management development programme significantly alters the potential outcomes. The issues raised in this comparison are presented in four main sections addressing aspects of the negotiating process, the nature of the relationship between client and provider, the content of the programme,
and some direct implications of the assessment process. The article concludes with an appraisal of the relative values of the two types of management development.

A COMPARISON OF QUALIFICATION AND NON-ASSESSED PROGRAMMES

Over recent years, in response to national and international initiatives in Management Education and Development, Bristol Business School has been developing a range of innovative programmes to assist working "In Partnership" with client organizations. There are two forms of In Partnership programme: those that lead to a nationally recognised qualification, which include formal student assessment, and those that are bespoke, designed solely to meet the needs as expressed by our clients.

The management qualification courses that we offer are the Certificate in Management, the Diploma in Management Studies, and the Masters in Business Administration. These have been designed to provide a comprehensive, yet responsive, programme of education and development for junior, middle, and senior managers. Considerable flexibility was designed into the programmes to allow a wide range of models of delivery and assessment to be utilised. This allows individual programmes to be designed to meet the needs of the clients, both in terms of content, process and timing. Some programmes are completed within a year, some spread over several years. Running such programmes In Partnership provides both nationally recognised quality and relevant, implementable outcomes for client organizations.

This study considers only Certificate in Management and Diploma in Management Studies programmes run with three organizations from the following sectors: Retail Services, Civil Service, Insurance Services. These programmes comprise workshops on a range of topics, covering all of the major areas of management: Finance, Personnel, Operations, Marketing,
Information, and Context. The participants are assessed in each of these areas through in-company projects and assignments.

The bespoke management development programmes that are run by Bristol Business School vary considerably in terms of length, content, style and approach. They are individually designed and delivered according to the expressed needs of the sponsoring client, the group of participants and our staff resource availability. They range from short, one or two day, workshops to longer programmes of management development that continue for several years. In this study, for greater comparability with the qualification programmes, we have selected three bespoke programmes that lasted for a year or more.

The first programme was for Senior Consultants from the Health Sector who were taking on general management responsibilities. Areas addressed on the programme included the identification of management development needs; the management context and functions of management; identifying the management role and responsibilities; and people management skills. Non-assessed organizational and personal development projects were also undertaken to support an Action Learning (Revans 1978) approach. The second programme comprised an outdoor management development programme which was delivered for middle to senior managers in a Civil Service organization. Areas addressed on the programme included team building; the diagnosis of managers' training and development needs; personal development planning; leadership, teamworking, and staff development. The third programme was for middle and senior managers from Local Government. Areas addressed on the programme included the management of strategic and cultural change, team building, and working on horizontal and vertical communications and relationships.
AN EVALUATION STUDY

A tailored qualification programme is clearly believed by some to offer the same development outcomes as a bespoke non-assessed programme, with the added value of accrediting the competence of the organization's management. It may be that there are irresistible political imperatives that are driving a move towards the qualification approach. However, is there a cost to be paid for the qualification that somehow changes the value of the development experience? Are there additional benefits of qualification programmes which outweigh these costs?

When we first identified the need for this paper it seemed an excellent choice both because it addresses a topic of current relevance and importance (with the impetus in the UK to provide National Vocational Qualifications for managers at various levels) and because it seemed to involve a straightforward comparison of the two categories of programme. However, in the production of this paper we have come to realise that there are not just two categories of programme, but it seems almost as many types as there are programmes that run! Thus, whilst recognising the conceptual difficulties in a comparison of this kind, this paper is intended to raise some interesting questions and contribute to an important debate on current issues in management development.

The research project that has provided the data for the comparison undertaken has involved investigating six "in partnership" management development programmes. Data collection was based largely on a combination of semi-structured one-to-one interviews, group evaluation reviews, and post-course questionnaires. We selected a range of programmes so that we covered clients in both the Public Sector (Local Authority, Civil Service and National Health Service) and the Private Sector (Retail and Insurance). We also selected a mix of three programmes that led to a qualification (Certificate in Management or Diploma in Management Studies) and three
non-assessed programmes (including Senior and Middle Management, with one incorporating Outdoor Management Development).

Our thesis is that by attaching a qualification to a management development programme the experience for the participants and the nature of the outcomes of the programme are both changed. We do not attempt to quantify this, but rather to explore the causes and the nature of the effects that have been observed. The list of issues identified is not intended to be exhaustive: they are the issues that arose from the data that we collected.

The following sections address the relative values of the different programmes, focusing on aspects of the negotiating process, the nature of the relationship between client and provider, the content of the programme, and some direct implications of the assessment process.

NEGOTIATING THE PROGRAMME

The negotiation process between client and provider, at the outset and throughout a programme, is a complex one requiring clients to articulate sometimes underdeveloped ideas on their management development needs. Similarly, as the providers we have the difficult task of describing the range of services that we can offer to meet their need. Understanding each other and collaborating on the selection and design of effective strategies requires learning on both sides. This process differs on qualification programmes and non-assessed programmes in the following ways:

*Power relationships between stakeholders*
In a partnership between two organizations, there will inevitably be various issues over which there is a difference of opinion. This difference can take the form of a struggle for power (Boot and Evans, 1990).

When a qualification is involved the required complexity of the definitive course documentation and the associated institutional regulations place the power to define what happens on the programme more firmly in the hands of the provider. This is necessary in providing a qualification to nationally recognised standards. However, it introduces a dynamic into the negotiating process that requires clear communication. We have found clients taking for granted their right to influence the programme to meet their needs only to find that their particular requirements cannot be accommodated within the existing framework. There must be a danger here of a provider with less than complete integrity using this power dynamic inappropriately. Thus the provider might, for example, use the situation to preserve a status quo, to avoid adapting content and/or delivery to respond to client need or, indeed, to sell an existing, but irrelevant, product.

Another result is that clients can become disempowered, abdicating their role in determining the nature of the programme because they do not understand the detail of the documentation. On one programme we found this sense of powerlessness affecting line managers, who failed, as a result, to become sufficiently involved in the process. This limited the effectiveness of the programme in their failure to encourage or assist the transfer of learning back into the workplace.

On non-assessed programmes the power balance can more readily be retained by the clients to define their needs and to influence the characteristics of the programme. Programme proposals are written to be understood by the client, and greater clarity is generated in the agreed contract.
Even so, a perceived imbalance of "expert" power can lead to withdrawal of the client from involvement in the process, and this should be managed carefully by the provider.

**Certainty and Uncertainty**

At one level, a programme that has a qualification attached to it can be more clearly understood by the client to have nationally recognised worth. Where this is the case, the qualification can bring a simplicity to the negotiating process. This can be of benefit to the training manager who may have to gain approval for the expenditure by selling the idea throughout the organization. A form of certainty exists.

The starting point for non-assessed programmes can often be a more complex process of addressing a "felt need". Wrestling with the difficulty of defining the requirements of the organization and trying to develop programme proposals and designs is very time consuming. Managing the uncertainty is difficult. In some circumstances, then, it is easier to make a qualification programme happen.

However, if the programme is to be genuinely effective in providing organizational benefit the client's involvement in matching the programme to organizational need is essential. The rationale of "nationally recognised worth" can mask the need to grapple with the difficult task of matching the programme design to needs from the beginning. If this does not take place, then the uncertainty will persist in a potentially destructive manner. For example, in one organization the participants believed that succession planning was the main intention of their qualification programme. They became increasingly frustrated when "outsiders" were recruited for middle management posts, whilst internal candidates from the programme were not promoted. It became clear, however, that the selection process for the first two cohorts on the programme had been
inappropriate: the "wrong people" were being developed. The needs of the organization and the extent to which the programme could meet those needs had not been sufficiently explored in the early stages of the programme. Having had their expectations raised by involvement in the programme many participants were extremely disgruntled, and a number had left the organization.

Who is the Client?

Working "in partnership" involves relating to a range of stakeholders. As in any consultancy intervention (Eden and Simpson, 1989), a management development programme has a range of potential "clients", but where there is a clash of interests amongst all of those clients, whose interests should we, as the provider, seek primarily to meet: those of participants, training manager, line managers, senior managers, or some other party?

On the three qualification programmes all negotiations have been between our qualification programme director and the company training manager. This does leave open the question of whose interests are represented and in what way? The training manager must balance personal and role needs, including the political difficulties of obtaining backing and funding for the programme from senior management, with the needs of the potential participants, and management needs throughout the organization.

In our research we saw that two of our non-assessed programmes were similar in that the commissioning agent was recognised to be the client. The other programme, however, incorporated much greater involvement of the participants and senior management in the negotiating process. In this case a Steering Group was set up incorporating the Personnel Manager with five participants. This group made decisions about the design and progress of the
programme. The focus of attention was on meeting their declared needs. Thus, a consequence of a rigorous attention to "needs" in the negotiation process is that the participant is more likely to be perceived as the client.

A way of summarising this might be to use a legal analogy. De jure the commissioning agent (for example, the training manager) is the client. In qualification programmes this person will also tend to become the de facto client. By contrast, in non-assessed programmes de facto clientship often passes to the participants.

Status of the Qualification

In some circumstances we have found that a qualification attached to a management development programme can give a status to the activity that attracts individuals to participate.

However, we have also found in two of the qualification programmes that the perceived worth of the Certificate qualification (more so than the Diploma) led to some middle/senior managers refusing to engage as participants, particularly where more junior managers were involved. Even some junior managers with good qualifications in other disciplines were deterred from participating because the qualification was below Masters level. This is a problem when the needs and strategy of an organization require the development of a range of individuals at varying levels throughout the organization. The non-assessed programmes do not elicit this prejudice to the same degree and there is more scope to define a programme to meet organizational needs and be inclusive of all levels in the hierarchy. In one of the non-assessed programmes we were able to develop the programme until the top three tiers of management were working together, with particular benefit coming from discussions of role, delegation and power. These issues were not
merely addressed hypothetically, but openly and directly between managers who were finding it
difficult working together.

THE NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CLIENT AND PROVIDER

Issues of power and clarity of communication have been discussed above. One further aspect of
the relationship between client and provider that we believe to be important in this debate is that
of commitment.

Commitment

Almost by definition qualification programmes last a relatively long period of time, generally at
least a year. The end date of the programme is also generally publicly known. Thus, once started,
clients are 'committed' to seeing through the whole programme. This can have significant benefit
in that as difficulties arise there is a dual interest for client and provider in resolving the problems
rather than for either to scapegoat the other. Having this time to work on the problem can allow
some extremely difficult, painful and, at times, politically sensitive, developmental experiences
to be worked through to a successful conclusion. In one organization the qualification programme
that had been running for three years, with a new cohort starting each year, a high level of
confidence had developed throughout participants, line managers and senior managers that this
was not "just another fad". The belief that the long term benefits of management development
would be realised clearly helped the different stakeholders to place lesser importance on some of
the problems that existed on the programme.

High levels of commitment also exist on some long-standing non-assessed programmes. However,
where the design is often more fluid, with continuous review built in, the programmes
are more vulnerable in the early stages. On one of the programmes in our study the client has
already taken three months to confirm the next stage of the programme, and a decision has not yet been made. Unless a committed relationship has already been established, the client can opt out more freely when difficulties arise.

CONTENT OF THE PROGRAMME

In all of the programmes in our study a basic aim has been to develop the managerial ability of the participants. A key question is whether the defined syllabus of a qualification programme is able to achieve this, and to what extent. Does management development need to be more responsive to the individual participant?

Structure and Responsiveness

The Definitive Course Documents for the qualification programmes are written with clear boundaries prescribing the nature of the material to be covered. Considerable flexibility was designed into the document to allow a wide range of models of delivery and assessment to be utilised. This allows the individual programmes to be designed to meet the needs of the clients. However, this flexibility only extends so far. For example, unless exemptions can be granted based on previous assessed work, all participants must be assessed in all parts of the syllabus, even where a part of the syllabus has no relevance to that manager's current or likely future role. The requirements for meeting established standards in terms of quality and content allow for no discussion.
Once committed to a qualification programme, therefore, the client is stuck with the basic package even where the development process raises an awareness that the needs lie in a different direction. For example, one Certificate in Management group worked for the first half of the year on managing teams and a key theme of handling conflict developed. The next part of the syllabus arrived just as the participants felt they had worked "through the pain" and that they were getting somewhere. At the end of the programme the evaluation process revealed that the participants had been extremely frustrated at being unable to work further on conflict management.

The manner in which we deliver our non-assessed programmes involves a high level of "conscious attention to process". There is an emphasis on the need for the individual learner to take responsibility and move toward autonomy (Rogers 1969), and on the development of the self by the self (Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell, 1986). This is combined with structured experiential learning (Kolb et al, 1974), and an action learning perspective with problem centred/project oriented group work (Revans 1978). The basic philosophy is thus structured but responsive, incorporating a high proportion of the time working with the needs of the group. In all three of the non-assessed programmes, large proportions of the course content was unclear at the beginning of the course. In contrast, participants knew exactly when and what they would be covering for a year ahead on each of the qualification programmes.

*Personal Development*

On non-assessed programmes this emphasis on process allows attention to "whole person" development, rather than merely "cognitive" development; a factor that has been argued as significant for the transfer of learning (Casey, 1981), and consequently for organizational benefit (Hamblin, 1974). One of the programmes, which incorporated Outdoor Management
Development, created a strong emotional response in participants alongside clear evidence of cognitive learning: a number talked of being "transformed".

There is a danger in qualification programmes, which involve considerable attention to written assignment work, that the emphasis will be upon "cognitive" development as this is the most easily assessed. A representative comment of a number of participants on the programme has been "I make sure I do enough to pass the assignments. Any learning beyond that is a bonus".

**SOME DIRECT IMPLICATIONS OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

A clear difference between the two categories of programme is the existence of assignments on the qualifications. This has implications.

*Motivation & Control*

In cases where the individual wishes to obtain the qualification on offer, personal motivation and energy can be high. Additionally, qualification programmes provide quality control mechanisms, particularly in relation to the production of assignments, that can lead to high levels of input and energy by participants. Fear of failure/desire to pass is a significant motivator for participants both personally and in organizational terms (i.e. what will my manager think/how will this affect my promotion?). Non-assessed programmes do not have the same "external" vehicles to control participant contribution, but are dependent upon voluntary commitment and "internal" motivation. This, too, can lead to high levels of input and energy by participants, but where internal motivation is low, energy levels can be low.

Without this external control non-assessed programmes may provide a less exposed environment in which participants are prepared to take risks and explore important, possibly dangerous, issues
such as personal power and the political structures within the organization. Qualification programmes can exacerbate the fear of negative repercussions in an organizational culture that punishes failure: success and failure are measured externally and published widely. This can inhibit risk taking.

Evaluating Benefits

In all of the programmes there exist processes to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the events for the participants and the organization in terms of the transfer of learning into the workplace. However, the extensive written assessments on the qualification programmes provide additional detailed information on the learning of individual participants. The issue of access to these written assessments by others in the organization (for example senior managers) is an important one, and needs to be clearly established at the beginning of a programme.

Non-assessed programmes do not easily provide mechanisms to externally monitor the individual learning that has been gained. Assessment is internal, with various forms of self- and peer-evaluation, including, for example, learning diaries and review sessions. Confidentiality of materials and conversations is an established ground rule.

SUMMARY

Our findings from this study of six organizations is that on qualification programmes:

* there can be greater simplicity in the process of gaining organizational backing
* programme longevity can assist the client and provider to reap long-term learning benefits
* difficulties experienced in the development process can be worked at by both client and provider
* participant energy levels tend to be high as a result of both internal motivation and external control mechanisms
* evaluation data is available on individual performance.

In contrast, on non-assessed programmes:
* participant needs tend to receive greater attention
* the organization is more able to ensure that programme design, content and process fit with its needs
* a rigorous diagnostic phase is encouraged
* there is scope to design programmes that are inclusive of all levels in the management hierarchy
* whole person development is encouraged
* the learning environment can be safer, allowing greater opportunity for experimentation with high risk development.

To conclude, there are strengths in both forms of programme. However, this does not mean that either can be chosen in any circumstance: although serendipity can lead to some benefit, we would argue that the success of a management development programme is dependent upon the extent to which it meets the identified needs of the participants and the organization. This requires a situational, contingent strategy, which is carefully timed to match wider organizational development strategies and processes.

Based on the general arguments made here it is not possible to make specific recommendations about which is the most appropriate form of programme in any one situation. Such an analysis is
well beyond the scope of this paper. However, one might begin such a consideration with the following ideas.

A qualification programme might be preferable where there exists organizational resistance to management development, there is a desire to institute a long-term programme of development at particular levels of management, where external control might help to provide energy and commitment in participants, and where monitoring individual performance is an important factor.

A non-assessed programme might be preferable where specific attention to identified managerial and organizational needs is required, where the organization is clear on their requirements and wishes to retain a significant influence on the design and progress of the programme, where development at a departmental level or at a range of managerial levels is required, and where there is high participant commitment to self-development involving personal risk taking.

Considering these issues is a key part of developing an organizational strategy for management development. Where the strategy for this is clearly worked out by Senior Management, the process of designing an effective programme is simplified (see, for example, Santhanaraj, 1990). Others support our view that where this has been the case the relationship between management development and organizational development is much tighter (Pate and Nielsen, 1987). However, the process of developing a strategy and determining how the programme fits with that strategy is difficult to manage (Simpson and Beeby, 1993). This can only be achieved by acknowledging the existence of these difficulties and working on them. There is a need for the ideas in this paper to be developed, and, most importantly, for the debate to continue not only at a general level, but also between providers and clients when establishing or reviewing a programme.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE I</th>
<th>A SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>QUALIFICATION PROGRAMMES</strong></td>
<td><strong>NON-ASSESSED PROGRAMMES</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negotiating the Programme</strong></td>
<td>Client retains power to define requirements. Issues are: programme proposals are written to be understood by the client, greater clarity in contract.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power relationship between stakeholders</strong></td>
<td>Balance of Power with the Provider. Issues are: complexity of course documentation, frustration of client, need for clear communication of boundaries, alienation of other stakeholders (eg line managers), provider retaining integrity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Certainty and Uncertainty</strong></td>
<td>&quot;Buying a Package&quot; is simple. Nationally recognised worth. Can lead to inhibiting or ignoring diagnostic phase of design process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who is the Client?</strong></td>
<td>&quot;De jure&quot; the commissioning agent. &quot;De facto&quot;, often training manager representing participants and senior management.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Status of the Programmes** | Can attract participants interest. "Lower Level" qualifications can elicit prejudicial response from senior managers and well qualified junior managers. Greater scope to define programme in an inclusive manner to meet managerial needs.
## TABLE II  A SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of Relationship Between Client and Provider</th>
<th>QUALIFICATION PROGRAMMES</th>
<th>NON-ASSESSED PROGRAMMES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>By definition at least 1 year duration. Clear start and end dates. Client committed to working through difficulties.</td>
<td>Variable length. Continuous revision of progress. Client can opt out more easily part way through a programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content of Programme Structure and Responsiveness</td>
<td>Programme content and sequence fairly rigid once started. Participants must take opportunities for development as they arise within the syllabus</td>
<td>Programme responsive to developing awareness of participants’ needs. Managing the direction of their learning is a key aspect of the participants’ development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Development</td>
<td>Emphasis on &quot;Cognitive&quot; development</td>
<td>&quot;Whole Person&quot; development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Direct Implications of the Assessment Process Motivation &amp; Control</td>
<td>High levels of energy from both internal motivation and external control. Fear of failure and of punishment can be debilitating.</td>
<td>Energy levels dependent upon high internal motivation. Less exposed environment allowing participants to take risks and experiment with development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating Benefit</td>
<td>Extensive data on individual learning to allow external</td>
<td>Assessment seen as an internal process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
evaluation. Evaluation as a form of learning is more common.
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