

# Learning to lead: Evaluation of a leadership development programme in a local authority social work service

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**Abstract:** *This article discusses the impact of a leadership development programme that attempted to develop leaders and leadership amongst actual and prospective managers within a large local authority social work service. It concentrates on empirical findings that illustrate the forms of change that took place at the level of the individual and those that extended beyond leader development and into leadership behaviours that involved collective and collaborative action. It sets the discussion in the context of previous studies into leadership development activities before briefly discussing the methods of evaluating training and education activities. The evaluation aimed to assess the impact the programme had on individual leadership practice, the participants' teams and on the provision of services through attempting to evidence observable performance outcomes. The findings suggest that there were elements of the programme that had sustainable impact at the level of the individual and in wider operational terms within the service.*

**Key words:** *leadership; social work; emotional intelligence*

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## **Introduction**

There has been significant investment and interest in leadership development for public sector staff in Scotland in recent years – not least by the Scottish Government. Although there is no single robust definition of leadership available within UK organisations there would appear level of coherence in the various definitions, markers and standards of effective leadership (Alimo-Metcalfe & Lawler, 2001). This coherence can be seen in some of the leadership development initiatives that have been evaluated and have produced recommendations on the crucial and successful elements of developing effective leadership. Strengthening leadership was a key feature of Changing Lives (Scottish Executive, 2006a). Changing Lives identified that in order to achieve transformational change it was crucial to construct a national framework strategically to develop leadership and management at all levels to empower the social service workforce to develop creative solutions to meet people's needs. The Changing Lives Implementation Plan (Scottish Executive, 2006b) proposed five change programmes: Performance Improvement, Service Development, Leadership and Management, Workforce Development and Practice Governance.

It was in this context that South Lanarkshire Council Social Work Resources invested in a range of workforce development activities. Many staff within the social work service had had the opportunity to participate in other leadership programmes such as the 'Leading to Deliver' and a variety of post graduate programmes. However, it was felt that there was a need to develop training that focused on building not only leader skills but also leadership behaviours that can help address the practical day to day challenges of working collaboratively, influencing and engaging with others and becoming more self aware (Iles & Preece, 2006). After some scoping work on the learning needs of staff in respect of leadership, a trainer<sup>1</sup> specialising in organisational and people development was commissioned to design and deliver leadership training to 60 staff in 6 cohorts, in a 14 day programme between December 2007 and March 2009. It was expected that the leadership development programme would also assist in creating a critical mass of leaders that could accelerate the process of enacting initiatives and changes required to address key issues (Hannum et al., 2007; Alimo-Metcalfe & Lawler, 2001) as well as contributing to succession planning and the retention of talented staff.

## **Evaluating leadership development activities**

The creation of specific leadership initiatives has been a key feature of the reform agenda in both central and local government. The Scottish Government has invested in a raft of leadership initiatives, conferences and activities. One of these was the Scottish Leadership Foundation (dissolved in 2008) and the Leading to Deliver

Programme, a leadership development programme designed for social service sector staff. Evaluations of the different leadership development programmes have suggested that the features that support successful leadership development include: models that support distributed leadership such as the utilisation of networks; the use of action learning sets or communities fostered and supported for a sustained period of time (Dinham et al., 2009; York Consulting, 2008; Granville & Russell, 2005; Bowerman, 2003; Watkins & Marsick, 1993). Clarity about what leadership looks like in an organisational context; senior managers making explicit links between their investments in leadership development activities and improvements or changes they want to make need to be clearly expressed and supported as a priority by senior managers (Ford & Gardner, 2005; Tourish et al., 2007).

However other evaluations have found that leadership development activities are not always seen as beneficial. Tourish et al., (2007) found a lack of support from senior management, partly due to an inability to prove a direct impact on organisational performance for leadership development activities and a perceived lack of time to participate. A number of reports that discuss leadership development in the Scottish Public Sector recommend that leadership development activities be evaluated in order 'to track the investment and evaluate effectiveness of that investment – simple models such as the Kirkpatrick framework should be routinely applied' (Ford & Gardner, 2005; Tourish et al., 2007; Grint et al., 2009). They also suggest that leadership development activities should take place within a clear policy framework that is aligned with organisational goals and objectives (Ford & Gardner, 2005; Tourish et al., 2007).

A seminar series organised by the Scottish Government and the ESRC in 2008 brought together a number social scientists to present their thinking on emerging theories of leadership and how these may inform the development of leadership in the public sector. This found leadership development activities were fragmented across the public sector resulting in duplication of effort and a lack of sharing of ideas of what has worked effectively and little evidence that investment in leadership development has paid off. It highlighted how many of the issues public services have to face are often deeply complex social problems that sit across and between governmental departments and institutions so attempts to treat them through a single institutional framework are likely to fail. Further, many of the challenges facing managers of social services are 'wicked' problems, in that they are complex and require leaders to facilitate innovative responses rather than rolling out known processes (Grint et al., 2009).

It was this backdrop that informed the development, delivery and content of the South Lanarkshire leadership development programme - the primary motivation behind the investment in the programme was the need to strengthen leadership and management at all levels in the organisation. It was felt many managers operated in procedural loops of custom and practice and were not exercising leadership roles despite being in key positions to enact change within the organisation. It was felt that

transactional managerial tasks were being delivered effectively but that this key group were poor at dealing with what Kotter (1990) describes as key leadership behaviours such as coping with change and instability. These were seen as important gaps at a time when social work provision was reconfiguring to provide more personalised services and funding constraints were demanding ever more cost efficient service delivery. It was important to assess whether and in what ways the programme impacted on participants' individual leadership practice, in particular to look for evidence of increased self awareness, improved communication within teams and with other participant colleagues and whether participants were enacting change to make a positive difference to social work services in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme, not least to inform further development.

It was acknowledged that whilst leadership and management shared common characteristics, leadership was concerned primarily with transformation and innovation (Skills for Care, 2008). It was with this in mind that the service wanted to develop leaders who could establish direction, articulate vision, inspire, motivate, energise and engage others and use research evidence to inform approaches and change. The senior management team wanted to support an accountable environment in which creative solutions could be developed by staff. The programme's strategy was to focus learning at the level of the individual participant but have each participant undertake a project which would require them to apply their learning to a real service challenge. As Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe observe to ensure the leadership development activity is sustained into practice, it must be embedded in the day-to-day behaviours of managers (2008, p.22). In this way the projects would connect individual development with the organisation's goals and purpose. In summary, the organisation needed to develop confident, adaptive leaders with excellent communication and influencing skills who would challenge existing practice using evidence-based collaborative methods. The programme was also an opportunity to improve succession planning by including practitioners with the potential to be leaders ('successors') and ensure leadership was developed across all levels of the organisation (Senge, 1992)<sup>2</sup>. For clarity, the following terms are used: 'participants' are the managers and successors who took part in the programme; 'managers' are the supervisors of the participants; 'senior managers' are the director and heads of the various social work departments.

In light of this, the aims of the Programme were broad and ambitious. It was designed to:

- Strengthen leadership among managers so as to improve services for council citizens and enhance partnership working with all stakeholders
- Build self awareness and emotional intelligence as foundations for effective and value based leadership (Burgess, 2005)
- Integrate leadership practice into a culture in which behaviours can be mirrored between managers and staff so as to influence the quality of encounter between staff and service users

- Establish consistent shared principles, based on robust theory and applied in day to day practice, so as to be as relevant to the quality of staff interactions as they are to the quality of communication with service users
- Build sustainable resources and skills into the service by coaching internal facilitators
- Strengthen capability for team working and optimise individual and team strengths towards clear shared purpose and objectives within an optimistic and resilient culture

Table 1  
Timescale for the programme

<i>Date</i>	<i>Activity</i>
November 2007	Launch event led by the Executive Director held for prospective participants and supporters.
December 2007	Introductory Information Day. Learning contract set with participants.
January 2008	Emotional intelligence inputs using the Interpersonal Dynamics Inventory (IDI) tool that measures and describes the impact a person's behaviour has upon the people with whom they interact <sup>3</sup> . Participants completed IDI profiles to provide insight into leadership style and adaptability.
March to November 2008	Five taught input days to 3 cohorts of 20 on Management and Leadership Theory by way of presentation, discussion, exercises and simulations.
March to November 2008	Six Action Learning sets to 6 groups of 10: facilitated peer group learning focused on real-world operational and strategic challenges.
August 2008	Project identification and design related to organisational objectives and including an analysis of current service, issue or proposal for performance improvement.
March 2009	Celebration of Learning and Application Conference Day attended by 390 delegates. Round table discussion between senior managers and participants about projects.
August to December 2009	Participants present progress reports to the Executive Director and Senior Management Team on the outcomes of their project work, barriers to change encountered and any further supports needed to facilitate change.

## Evaluation

Informed by the reports suggesting that leadership development activities should be evaluated, South Lanarkshire Social Work Resources collaborated with the Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS) to undertake an independent evaluation of the programme<sup>4</sup>. A range of options were considered.

The main thrust of the evaluation was to look for the impact it had on individual participants' leadership behaviours and the impact that the individual was having within teams or service area through those behaviours and through project work. Impact was expected to be seen within 6-12 months of the programme ending. The theory of change approach has been used to gather data in order to test out whether and to what extent and in what contexts individual change leads to broader outcomes (Gutierrez & Tasse, 2007). However this approach is perhaps best suited to community based initiatives that seek multiple level outcomes across several programme areas; this evaluation was not focusing on the process of change. The programme was not quasi-experiential or experimental, nor was it measuring the return on investment, these aims may have required a different evaluation methodology than the one used. Although the evaluation would inform future leadership development activities, we were not looking at training design or the evaluation as a learning experience in the way Preskill and Torres describe (1999). The literature on models of training evaluation is dominated by the Kirkpatrick model (1983, 1994). Kirkpatrick's four stage model (1983) of evaluating training focuses on responses to learning from the most immediate to the most distant. Kirkpatrick's model has been extended to evaluate societal impact but this extension was beyond the aims and scope of the evaluation so not utilised. Having explored other approaches to evaluating the programme we concurred with Tamkin et al., (2002) 'Kirkpatrick's model remains very useful for framing where evaluation might be made' (2002, p.xiii). Thus Kirkpatrick's four stage model (response, learning, behaviour and impact) (1994) of evaluating training became the methodological scaffold for this evaluation.

However, the evaluation was cognisant that relatively little correlation has been found between learner reactions and measures of learning and subsequent measures of changed behaviour (Warr et al., 1999; Alliger & Janak, 1989; Holton, 1996). It also took into account the literature that states although knowledge tests may indicate learning they do not indicate whether and to what extent the learning has been applied, future performance or the attainment of soft skills (Ghodsian et al, 1997). An 'open systems perspective' (Grove et al., 2007) was useful, we adopted elements of this approach to explore three different but interrelated forms of change: episodic, developmental and transformative in the individual domain. In addition we looked for observable performance outcomes as a way of determining the transfer of learning to practice (Hicks & Hennessy, 2001). This allowed us to account for not only external knowledge and skills acquisition but also the more personal

learning experiences, insights, reflections, understandings and how these influenced participant's leadership practice in the workplace. This meant the evaluation was more qualitative than quantitative, exploring the softer, experiential affects and applications of learning.

## Methods

Table 2  
Linking methods to programme objectives

<i>Method</i>	<i>Objective of programme</i>
Knowledge tests ( $n=40$ ) on taught input prior to and after delivery of training.	To assess knowledge gain in relation to the principles of leadership
S e m i - s t r u c t u r e d questionnaires ( $n=40$ ) prior to and after delivery of training.	To assess whether expectations of programme were shared and met
Two focus groups with participants ( $n=16$ ) at end of taught programme	To explore sense of ownership, shared principles of leadership, learning insights, perceptions of impact of learning at an individual level.
One to one interviews ( $n=5$ ) with key stakeholders including senior managers.	To explore whether expectations of programme were shared and perceptions about whether its aims were being met.
One to one interviews with participant mentors ( $n=6$ )	To explore perceptions of and examples of impact of learning at an individual level
One to one interviews ( $n=12$ ) with participants	To explore with participants their perceptions on the impact the learning had had on their leadership practice including their self awareness, communication and interaction patterns, team working, emotional intelligence, adaptability and enacting change.
One to one interviews ( $n=10$ ) with line managers of participants.	To explore their perceptions on whether and in what ways the programme had had an impact on participants' leadership practice including their self awareness, communication and interaction patterns, team working, emotional intelligence, adaptability and enacting change.
One to one interviews with peer colleagues ( $n=11$ ) of participants	To explore whether they perceived any changes in interaction style and approach, whether they were aware of the project work and or changes in working practices during and after their manager had been on the programme.

Follow up telephone interviews (n=12) with participants 6 months after programme completion	To explore whether any perceived changes in style, approach or practice had been strengthened or sustained.
Analysis of the project materials (n=10)	To evidence whether and in what way the projects had found solutions to an operational issue, used evidence or enacted positive change.

## Findings

### Preparing to learn, preparing to change

The literature on learning transfer suggests that participants need to be prepared for change as well as being prepared to change. Transfer of learning will be enhanced through making links between the individuals' and the organisation's needs, linking the programme learning goals to individual learning goals and clarifying and sharing expectations of the programme (Cherniss et al., 1998; Burke & Hutchins, 2007). The data suggested that for most participants this had been achieved.

All senior managers were very clear about the relationship between the programme and the goals and objectives of the social work service and the learning needs of its workforce. They were clear and actively supportive of the programme's ambition to facilitate experiential growth, reflection and development, to give participants an opportunity to influence operations through undertaking a project related to their role, responsibility and to organisational objectives. However managers and participants were less clear about the ethos of the programme. Managers would have benefited from being given explicit criteria to help them nominate staff, support to discuss with staff if it was a performance issue that was informing their nomination and attending the information day held before the start of the programme. Senior managers could have communicated more clearly the potential informal and formal value and rewards of participation to managers and participants.

Expectations about what the training would deliver are important, not least because if participants and their managers do not expect anything to change as a result of input then it seems likely that the transfer of learning will be negatively affected. There were, however, high expectations of this programme across the service. The vast majority of participants expected the training to increase their knowledge about leadership and management, increase their leadership skills and most expected that they would make changes to their leadership and management practice as a result of the training. Specifically most participants expected to have greater awareness of leadership styles, how their style affects their work and colleagues, have an increased ability to use new knowledge on leadership styles and skills to develop themselves



and others. A significant number also expected to be given opportunities to practice new skills, learn from others and learn strategies to build on their strengths and overcome their weaknesses. Participants seemed less confident around expecting the programme to make a significant difference to their practice although they did expect that an increased self awareness would make them more effective in practice.

### **Reported Learning**

Importantly the expectations of the participants were largely met. The majority cited an increased knowledge of and insight into their own adaptability and effectiveness, an increased awareness of different leadership styles and how to put different approaches into practice. The action learning sets were felt to be particularly valuable in enabling peer learning, gaining insight into how they and other colleagues approached challenges as well as giving many a greater understanding of the function and roles within the service.

The response to the taught element of the programme was less positive although the knowledge tests showed the teaching inputs significantly contributed to knowledge gain amongst participants, particularly on the difference between leadership and management, effective adaptive leadership, emotional intelligence and approaches to enacting change, all key aims of the programme.

The projects provided many participants with a vehicle to apply their learning in an area meaningful to them. They provided an opportunity to use evidence in an explicit and informed way to shed light on an operational concern and possible strategies to overcome it.

### **Reported changes in behaviour**

Questionnaire and interview data from participants, managers, colleagues and senior managers conducted after the programme suggested that the programme had impacted on many participants' leadership abilities and behaviours. Most perceived the programme to have had greatest impact in relation to increasing their self-awareness about their own management and leadership style. The majority of participants felt they had a greater awareness of their style of interaction and communication and had increased their adaptability. Increased self awareness was prompting them to think more often about how they related to their colleagues, how their style impacted on their colleagues and affected their ability to manage and lead. Many talked of various ways they were trying to increase their adaptability. For some this translated into making determined efforts to change the way they interacted with colleagues, for example, to be less directing, be more facilitative and help staff learn for themselves and by encouraging the staff they managed to take more responsibility.

*I try and help them come up with the answers rather than me giving them or feeling I should be giving them all the answers*

This seemed to take place mostly in supervision or team meetings although some had adjusted their 'office door' policy – for some this meant lessening the frequency of providing immediate responses, for others it meant taking more time to engage with staff and being more open to spontaneous dialogue. Whatever the changes, most participants seemed to be more proactive in thinking through the best way to approach an issue, a member of staff or a situation as well as reflecting on how well those went and how to resolve them more satisfactorily and effectively next time.

Application of learning was not only perceived to have happened by participants. Managers were able to cite examples of where they felt the programme had made a difference to participants. They too felt many participants were demonstrating an increased adaptability in their style and approach to problem solving, using the learning to manage operational change, using the learning to develop an aspect of service and using their increased self-awareness to relate to colleagues in more constructive ways. Some felt participants were also showing an increased tendency to reflect, be more confident in their decision making abilities and had improved their writing skills.

Importantly, these changes were also reported by half of participants' colleagues. These quotes illustrate the changes they saw in their managers since being on the programme.

'new style of managing, talking less and encouraging us to try and come up with solutions'

'listens more, like if you go to the office they will ask us to wait rather than try and deal with it straight away, this is not a bad thing because it means they listen more and you feel you are really getting their attention'

'you see it at team meetings or in supervision, they encourage staff to take more responsibility'

'encourages us to find things out for ourselves and solve problems this has made me more confident'

The projects offered further evidence of behaviour change as these were often the vehicles for participants to develop and practice their new found knowledge and skills and to influence change. Most participants reported to have involved their staff team to some extent in their projects and almost all participants had invited colleagues to the 'exhibition of change projects' where they illustrated their work. Some of the colleagues were very enthused by the projects and stated they had learned a lot from being involved, seeing how it was making a positive difference to service delivery

and or team working. Although these data indicates some learning transfer, it was important to gather evidence of sustained learning.

### **Sustained transfer of learning at individual level.**

Ten of the twelve participants followed up 6 months after the programme perceived a continued and sustained impact of the programme on their practice and style of leadership. One felt the programme had provided a solid platform to undertake further academic leadership education. Another felt the programme had prompted greater reflection on their career pathway and they had successfully applied for a more strategic position in the organisation. Another reported having more 'balcony moments' (ability to stand back and reflect on the bigger picture). Almost all felt their increased self awareness about their own leadership style had been sustained, and they reported using the learning to foster and maintain better collegial relationships.

Two of the twelve participants followed up maintained the programme had had little impact on their leadership style or practice as a manager. However, both felt that their project work had informed their thinking about service provision and one felt the information gathering process done in the course of the project would inform local service development in the future.

### **Moving beyond the individual: evidence of transformative change**

The project work offered a way to evidence whether, to what extent and in what ways participants were using their learning to enact change and make service improvements. In total the programme generated 45 projects covering the full spectrum of social work services.

Table 3  
Summary of Participant Projects

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*Eleven projects targeted work with children and young people:*

Promotional work on the health care needs of young carers; changes to the ways child care reviews are conducted; earlier multi-agency intervention with children at risk of offending; working with fathers estranged from their children; reducing violent incidents in children's homes; supporting young people in crisis; improved support to child victims of sexual abuse; assessment of child neglect; support to people who adopt children; a review of the supported carers payment scheme; and improvements to child protection training.

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*Five projects aimed to improve services to older people:*

Promotion of healthier eating for older people; increasing the choice of meaningful activities for older people in residential care; increasing access to day care services; reducing medication

errors in residential homes; and a fall prevention programme with people at risk of hip fractures.

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*Four projects focused on home care services:*

Improvements to communication with the workforce; health promotion of the workforce; the setting up of an overnight emergency respite service; and a more effective system for performance measurement and reporting.

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*Four projects were concerned with criminal justice services:*

Development of community justice services; changes to the assessment of risk of re-offending; using feedback from service users; and supporting people who use illegal drugs and are otherwise unknown to social services.

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*Nine projects related to organisational change:*

Improvements to the computer information system; changes to how goods and services are procured; changes to systems for monitoring contract compliance; improvements to the use of complaints from service users and carers; more innovative approaches to learning and development; changes in how the organisation supports students; promoting change in recruitment practice; proposals to change how front-line services are funded; and the setting up of an emergency 'out of hours' social work service.

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Twelve projects were selected to explore whether in wider operational terms they had had an impact in the workplace. The data suggested that the majority had made a positive impact operationally. We found, like Boaden (2006) that many participants were better placed to utilise evidence effectively which is a factor not often cited in the leadership literature. Participants were evidently using their learning to take an enquiry approach in order to solve problems and address complex issues. There was evidence to support a refinement and improvement to processes and systems. Many of the projects were collaborative in nature with participants using the learning from the programme to influence others and engage others in change. Many projects involved extensive communication and collaboration and it was felt that through the project the communication between staff had improved and some staff reported feeling more involved and better supported in carrying out their duties. There was evidence to support the projects bringing about service enhancement. An example of this was in a home for older people, where the participant engaged the residents and staff to design a new way of providing a meaningful choice of activities to residents. The feedback from residents on the changes was positive.

There was evidence to suggest participants were able to sustain their learning through implementing the projects with some managers explicitly encouraging participants to apply their learning through encouraging further developmental projects. The evaluation underlined the importance of enlisting the active support and involvement of managers, as found similarly by Peters and Baum (2007) participants appeared to learn to lead on the job. Leadership development behaviours were strengthened by having the support and opportunities to enact learning through action orientated projects. The impact of this programme seems to have been considerably

enhanced by the inclusion of projects designed to explore and address an operational challenge. The projects and participants all needed to be supported and encouraged to maintain momentum, especially when they came across hurdles or time delays. There was evidence to suggest they had support from one another, from some managers, some colleagues and the senior management team. One participant encapsulated the benefits of integrating the change projects into the programme

*the organisation has benefited from us doing practical projects where the outcomes need to be evidenced, the project was a responsibility and made me talk to people in and out of the organisation that I may not have had the confidence to otherwise, it has shown me that I can influence change. (participant)*

## **Discussion**

This programme was designed with maximising the transfer of learning in mind. There is significant evidence that the programme met its aims although, as this evaluation has shown, it did not work for all participants. There are lessons to be learned particularly about the need to pay more attention to the selection process and the prior preparation of the participants' managers to support participant learning. There are particular features of this programme that have the potential to inform the way leadership development activities can be used not only to develop adaptive innovative leaders but to improve the provision of social services to citizens. Many of the participants, their managers and colleagues specifically mentioned how participants, rather than providing answers or use processes to manage issues. Participants were now more likely to ask questions, ask their staff teams to think through an issue, discuss issues in team meetings, encourage staff to raise issues in team meetings and reflect on issues before responding. Leadership success is rooted in persuading followers that at any one time the problematic situation is one of a critical, tame or wicked nature and adjusting behaviour to the appropriate authority form – command, management or leadership (Grint et al., 2009). The evidence suggested that many of the participants had learnt this and were actively trying to apply this learning to practice.

Although all the elements of the programme contributed to the transfer of learning there were particular features that stood out as being significant in this regard. This evaluation supports previous findings that action learning is useful for critically reflecting on leadership styles and behaviour and helping participants build constructive supportive learning relationships with one another. Discussing operational challenges, sharing lessons learnt, approaches and potential solutions in a collective way was reported to help participants reflect on their style of leadership in ways which facilitated them to be more adaptable in the workplace. Some talked

about having more 'tools in their kit', of being more aware of what approach to use for different situations and with different colleagues. Learning also would appear to have been enhanced indirectly through putting both operational and support staff together on the programme. This gave some staff, often those less experienced, a greater understanding of the organisation as a whole, its structure, and greater insight into the various functions and roles of other staff and services. These insights seem to have positively affected the ability to work within and across the various strands of the service; it informed the approaches of participants to implementing change, facilitated confidence around joint working and seeking to influence change. Leadership in this case would appear to have been developed in the way Iles and Preece (2006) suggest, where the emphasis is on building relationships, networks and commitments. Thus it facilitated not only leader development but the development of leadership in the context of the collective action.

The project element of the programme proved a significant vehicle for the transfer of learning. It gave participants a practical opportunity to focus on an issue meaningful to their practice and or service, to use their learning and evidence gathering to influence and enact operational change. The projects were an effective process for both individual and organisational learning and development. Many were collective in nature and required concerted thinking and action over a sustained period of time. The findings support that leadership development has to take place on the job, people learn to lead by leading. Leadership development requires both opportunity and support in the work settings (Peters & Baum, 2007). The findings suggested that many participants were effectively 'modelling' how to adapt to and influence change to staff through their project work. This finding underlines the importance of giving participants legitimised and proactive support over a sustained period of time to enact change, try new approaches, different ways of doing things in a collective fashion. Key to this was the decision by senior managers not to direct participants in the selection of project but rather to give participants the autonomy to decide where change and improvement was required. As Peters and Baum (2007) indicate development activities can create the potential but the context provides the opportunity to perform and apply that learning. The direct supervisor is key to creating local context and if they do not legitimise activities and allow participants time and resources to facilitate the application of what has been learnt, not much can be expected.

As Cherniss et al., (1998) state, continuous improvement of both learning programmes and staff is essential in maximising the investment of participants and the organisation. One way continuously to improve learning programmes is to evaluate their impact and use the findings to inform further development. The findings from this evaluation have shaped South Lanarkshire Council's approach towards leadership of the organisational and practice changes required to develop personalised services.

'The irony of leadership (as opposed to management or command) is that it is the most difficult of approaches as it implies the leader does not have the answer, it requires the leader to make the collective face up to responsibility, the answer

is going to take a long time to construct and that it will require constant effort to maintain' (Grint et al., 2009:7). This is a difficult, possibly unpopular route when engaging in management or command would be easier. However, in times when change is the norm, leaders and managers in social services are required to do more, often with less and often in a different way. Perhaps those who have a responsibility for leading the social service workforce have to embrace a 'wicked' approach to the 'wicked' challenges faced. As Grint et al. (2009:2) state 'new demands on leadership in the Scottish public sector are not likely to be well served by traditional leadership development'. They suggest that public services need to embrace leadership and further to consider the potential of leadership less as a property of individuals and more as a collaboration that embraces active learning, critical reflection and active intervention rooted in sound evidence. Changing Lives identified that in order to achieve transformational change it is crucial to empower the social service workforce to develop creative solutions to meet citizens' needs. Aspects of this programme demonstrated that through investing in and giving opportunities to staff to enact change through using evidence, practice wisdom and professional knowledge can not only develop leadership at an individual level but it can also expand the organisation's capacity to enact basic leadership tasks needed for collective work (Hannum et al., 2007) .

## Notes

1. Robin Burgess, Organisation, Leadership and People Development ([www.robinburgessolpd.co.uk](http://www.robinburgessolpd.co.uk))
2. For a fuller discussion see Stevenson, H. (2010) Practitioner Leadership: how do we realise the potential within? In Zwanenberg, Z. *Leadership in Social Care*. London: Jessica Kingsley
3. IDI is the Interpersonal Dynamics Inventory - a tool that measures and describes the impact a person's behaviour has upon the people with whom they interact. [www.idi360.co.uk](http://www.idi360.co.uk)
4. The evaluation of the Leadership Development Programme was one project amongst a number of 'demonstration projects' aimed to embed research and evaluation into social services activity, to increase capacity and capability of social service organisations to undertake and use research in order to improve outcomes for service users. IRISS completed their involvement during June 2009 and the original researcher undertaking the evaluation as an IRISS employee was then commissioned independently by Social Work Resources to complete the final stage of fieldwork (evidencing impact through observable performance outcomes) and write up the evaluation findings. The researcher sought consent from all participants to gain access to their projects, to carry out focus groups and individual interviews. Attention was paid to ensuring participants' willingness

to take part, informing the participants about the scope of the project and how the data would be used. Attention was also paid to issues of confidentiality and identifiability. It was important that all research participants felt comfortable with participation. The Social Research Association Guidelines (2005) provided the basis for the ethical conduct <http://www.the-sra.org.uk/ethical.htm>

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