Developing Managers: A View from the Non-profit Sector

Jan Myers
Department of HRM
Nottingham Business School
The Nottingham Trent University

Jan Myers is a senior lecturer in the Department of HRM at Nottingham Business School contributing to undergraduate, post-graduate and post-professional courses around organisational behaviour and employee learning and development. She has practitioner experience working with a range of non-profit and public sector organisations.

Comment [MCB1]: Dr. Myers was a professor in Dalhousie's Faculty of Management, but returned to Great Britain. You'll note that her spelling conforms to British standards.
Abstract
This paper is rooted in practitioner experience of working within the non-profit sector. It is both underpinned by master’s level research and built upon as part of an on-going sensemaking (Weick, 1995) process for the author in terms of her doctoral research. Focusing on a specific part of the sector – local development agencies (LDAs), the research is exploring how personal theories emerge and the heuristics (rules of thumb) chief executives of such agencies use to develop and enhance their practice. As such, this paper draws on fieldwork involving in-depth interviews with 20 chief executives and considers the context, focus and roles of chief executives in relation to learning and development needs. As such, this is not a search for “truth” or for blueprints for managers, but represents a concern for and interest in how people - “puzzled” individuals (after Baumard, 1999) who have to deal with ambiguous situations day-by-day - juggle multiple realities and what informs their (thinking and) actions.

A version of this paper was first presented at the Critical Management Studies Conference, Lancaster, UK, July 2003.

Key words
Non-profit, management development, leadership, voluntary sector

Introduction
In an article that appeared in an earlier volume of this journal, I was writing with a colleague (Myers and Sacks, 2001) about our concern to harness the talents of a “loose and baggy monster” (Kendall and Knapp, 1995). The “monster” in question was the amorphous mass of micro, small, medium, large and extra-large organisations that might be included as belonging to the

Comment [MCB2]: The abstract gives a quick glimpse of the article’s content and perspective. Limits are placed on the article so that readers know what to expect in the article and what not to expect. Here it is obvious that Dr. Myers was presenting a glimpse of the problem from a limited perspective and not a huge study offering prescriptive findings. Read later in these comments about qualitative research.

Comment [MCB3]: The “key words” give the reader an indication of the article’s coverage. If readers find the article’s content important for their own work, they can use the key words as search words in database search engines. (Another way to find more information on topics is to turn to the reference section. Read through it to find sources of additional information. We can almost become detectives as we search for more and more pertinent information.)

Comment [w4]: PLEASE NOTE: This document follows Harvard style guidelines. Please refer to current style guidelines, instructor preferences, or journal requirements to determine the correct style for your paper.
UK voluntary and community sector; the ‘third sector’. One of the challenges identified for the sector in that paper was in the level and range of effective development interventions to maximise impact for both the individuals and the organisation with a view to “developing resourceful human beings in managing change creatively [to] help organisations focus and learn for current and future actions” (Kendal and Knapp, 1995, p 455). The concern was the need to interpret and contextualise the systems and lessons that could be learned for improved organisational development and leadership from the public and private sectors and for some means of reciprocal learning opportunities across sectors.

Since this time there has been increased discussion for the UK non-profit sector in terms of skills development and leadership for the future. These discussions have been given increased weight and centrality through a government cross-cutting review, which we can also link with a perceived key role for the sector in addressing governmental domestic agenda of social and economic regeneration, modernising public services and of a general push to increase education and training levels and attainment. Recent world events also bear witness to the relevance and contribution of third sector non-governmental agencies - international aid, medical and environmental agencies - and their global roles and networks.

In some senses, then, some charities may be “big business” and are increasingly being seen as a legitimate arena for employment and even, to a certain extent, careers, yet where there is also a perceived lack of value for “home grown” managers and leaders with some organisations preferring to “to recruit senior staff from other sectors, because they place more emphasis on the ‘hard’ skills needed to run organisations, and believe that ‘imports’ are...
more likely to have them” (Bolton and Abdy, 2003, p 5). However, findings from a recent report from ACEVO and NCVO (the Association for Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations and the National Council for Voluntary Organisations – two major third sector national organisations) suggest that many voluntary sector leaders possess some of the “softer” skills – communication, emotional attachment, integrity, influencing and networking skills – that are “increasingly prized by both the corporate and public sectors” ((Bolton and Abdy, 2003, p 5)).

While this distinction between “hard” (private sector) and “soft” (third sector) may be both limited and limiting, it still begs the question of what does management and leadership development look like in the non-profit sector? What we see is that while there is a growing pressure on the sector to “demonstrate good practice across a range of operational issues” (Etherington, 2001), there is no consistent or sustained approach to management development in the sector. Indeed, “[c]harities are, for the large part, absent from the analytical vocabulary of both organisation theory and strategic management” (Butler and Wilson, 1990, p 21). Furthermore, if it is difficult to define what managers do and even “to make any coherent sense of management” (Alvesson and Wilmott, 1996, p 9) then to consider how to develop “management” seems equally difficult. Where traditional management education has been driven by the priorities of large for-profit businesses and in this sense privileged “the claims of technical, instrumental reasons [then] alternative…values and practices are frequently marginalised and devalued” (Alvesson and Wilmott, 1996, p 11,13). In order, therefore, to be more inclusive of the needs, values and expertise of voluntary sector managers and to provide insights in to how “they modify or develop their understandings and practices”, (Watson and Harris, 1999, p17), it may...
therefore be appropriate to consider the emergent and experiential nature of managing and learning in the sector (Billis and Harris, 1996).

In this way, developing managers can be seen through different lenses, for example: in terms of how learning opportunities and resources may be used in order to develop managers’ skills, tools and techniques, which in turn may have implications for organisational performance (Myers and Sacks, 2003). Or, for example, a different yet related focus is to consider how, over time, through experience and participation, managers as practitioners learn through the context of their work and their interactions with others. Moreover, their continuous development and knowledge acquisition in “learning to manage” needs “to be understood in the light of their life, identity and biography as a whole” and it may be pertinent to “abandon the notion of management learning and talk instead about ‘life learning relevant to managerial work’” (Watson, 2001, p 230). This gives attention to the politicised nature of managerial action, acquisition and value of different kinds of knowledge and problematises the notion of ‘leadership’ and ‘management development’ as unstable.

**Developing a view from the non-profit sector.**

In order to find out how this happens and in designing doctoral research it seemed appropriate to consider a number of questions: how do local development agency chief executives respond to changing circumstances? How do they enhance their practice? How do they learn from their experiences and construct personal theories [Kelly, 1955]? In this way, the main approach of the research so far has been to explore these and other questions by the “pursuit of essential meanings through dialogue with others” (Kaplan, 1995, p 55), that is through the personal narratives and life stories.
of chief executives (Atkinson, 1998). To this end, twenty chief executives of local development agencies were approached to participate in research consisting of, at this point, two-rounds of in-depth semi-structured interviews. By giving chief executives time out to discuss and reflect on themselves and their experiences, the richness of the information collected gives depth and breadth to the biographical and experiential detail available for subsequent analysis. The scope of the research is confined to a specific part of the non-profit sector – local development or infrastructure organisations (LDAs). LDAs are intermediary charitable bodies that support the development and sustainability of other voluntary sector and volunteer-led organisations and act at the interface between the voluntary sector and public and private sectors. As such, the organisational context provides a particular challenge for chief executives and an interesting arena for research.

Working within a qualitative research framework, the first set of interviews were semi-structured providing opportunity for the participant to influence the process of the interview with issues considered relevant and important around broad themes of their own practice, personal development and the context in which they work. It is from this first set of interviews that the quotes used in this paper are derived.

Through this initial work, tensions became apparent in “supporting and facilitating the learning of individuals…groups…and organisations” (McGoldrick et al, 2002, p 396). Tensions [were seen] also between enhancing learning through formal routes of education, training, development of practical management and leadership potential, appropriate application of tools and techniques (“best” practice) and the more informal routes of learning through social interaction, networks and exchange. This link between formal

Comment [MCB10]: The author indicates to the reader how she has found data for her work. Rather than conducting a quantitative study, she is using a qualitative approach. Quantitative studies usually involve large sample groups, obtain statistical information, and often test theories. Qualitative studies, on the other hand, usually are exploring a new area of research, and researchers seek greater understanding of the situation. Case studies and ethnographies will often be their choice of research methodology. Findings are not seen as generalizable, but they can be seen as transferable.
and informal learning may also echo previous discussions (Rachal, 2002; Knowles, 1990) in exploring a more andragogical approach to management learning and development for the non-profit sector. While mainstream management education may be dominated by for-profit needs and the language associated with this, where non-profit managers access such education they have to contextualise and reframe some (not all) of the tools and techniques on offer; in other words they have to develop a “bilinguality” where they have to “learn two paradigmatic-theoretical systems – they’re own and the dominant one” (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000, p 189).

While this puts an emphasis on individual learning and capabilities, as key strategic players within their organisations, building the capacity of managers as “competent actors” (Poell et al, 2000, p 35) may in turn influence actions of other organisational members and provide the structures and processes to build the capacity (learning and development) of the organisation. Via a critical approach that considers individual learning in relation to the contexts, environments and cultures in which individuals think and act, there are opportunities to link non-profit sector and cross-sector learning and, to return to a previous concern, to attempt to harness the talents of the “loose and baggy monster” (op cit, 1995).

**Juggling: multiple stakeholders and accountability**

It is suggested that non-for-profit organisations tend to be “more complex than business firms of comparable size (Anheier, 2000, p 7;Hill, 2000) both in ‘external’ environmental considerations e.g. diversity of stakeholder needs and requirements and multiplicity of revenue streams and, ‘internally’, in terms of relationships with and between staff, volunteers, service users and trustees. It is this context, which provides a particular challenge for chief
executives in “managing tensions between internal values or aims and the external policy environment” (Scott et al, 2000) and multiple stakeholder perspectives. As chief executives explain:

“I say to anybody that comes for a job here that you have to be happy living with grey. That nothing here is black and white…it’s sort of a known world, but you never quite know where you are going”.

“It is becoming increasingly difficult to retain a sense of the issues and needs the organisation wishes to address without them being shaped by the analysis provided by each tier of government: central government, regional development agencies, local authorities”

In the same way that there has been increased public scrutiny of corporate social responsibility, there has been increasing scrutiny, too, of the not-for-profit sector and the need to demonstrate increased efficiency, effectiveness and accountability. Predominantly this has been in terms of financial accountability, but also in terms of broader social goals (for example, contributing to the social regeneration of communities, building social capital, and managing diversity). Juggling the needs of multiple stakeholders (see Fig. 1), how managers assess priorities for action and how they evaluate their activities “provides insight into the conceptual and practical dilemmas of implementing a broad approach to accountability in nonprofits” (Ospina et al, 2002, p 6):

“I think the accountabilities are fairly clear to me actually…they are on a balanced scorecard. They are inevitably a range of stakeholders facing slightly different directions and that’s the politics.
of it; you have to balance it all. Sometimes, you know, if you can keep the balance all the time nicely then you’re doing well, but it shifts around”.

“I mean as voluntary organisations become more engaged on a contractual basis with public, with the state – local or central – there’s been a need to demonstrate that you can hack it, delivering programmes funded from public money and that’s one of the reasons we’ve had to professionalise”.

Take in Fig. 1 Multiple Stakeholders impacting on CEOs

Accelerating this perceived need to “professionalise”, has been a key shift in encouraging active engagement between public, private and voluntary sectors in establishing and maintaining collaborative working relationships (policy and legislation aimed at modernising public services and local government; economic and social regeneration and volunteering as gateways to employment). With increasing privatisation of public sector services and the pressure to modernise, we also find the interpretation of business enhancing tools for use in public sector organisations being passed on to voluntary sector organisations (Myers & Sacks, 2003). This, in a sense, is a critical turn for the non-profit sector in both responding to this pressure and enhancing management development and leadership in the sector:

“It’s the cultural difference that is the interesting one and what I’m interested in trying to do is to get the professional elements [in planning, thinking, explaining and questioning] without losing the value of the voluntary commitment.”
In order to be “both professional and entrepreneurial” (Etherington, 2001) in growing and developing non-profit sector organisations, there is increasing emphasis on “leadership, drive and effectiveness” (Gormley, 2000) and for non-profits to become “more business-like”. Yet, which business and whose business-like practices are not defined.

Balancing: inside out or outside in?

The sector’s confidence, and the ability and competence of voluntary sector leadership, to be proactive in determining the nature of these cross-sector relationships underpin much of the current debate on its future (Myers and Sacks, 2001). As LDAs deal with the opportunities and challenges arising from changing governmental priorities - local, national and increasingly international through a European agenda - there is a certain fluidity to LDAs as staffing levels fluctuate and organisational structures adapt and change over time:

“I tell this story now, that on the 30\textsuperscript{th} of March, I went home on Friday night with sixteen staff and came in on Monday morning with thirty-two staff. And so I’m in the process of having to change the way I do things”.

Partly this is in response to the constraints of short-term project based funding arrangements:

“Our staffing at any one point is anywhere between two-dozen and thirty depending upon what project might have just gone independent.”
It also gives a “strategic-development dimension” to managerial activity (Anheier, 2000, p 9). While it might be seen in the public and for-profit sector that “for many directors the pace of change can drive out ability to innovate” (Holbeche, 2002, p 203), in the non-profit sector the pressure is on to anticipate, respond and create new opportunities, as chief executives explain:

“We will, for example, look at the policy issues current and on the horizon ie statutory agencies priorities [and] consider the impact, opportunities and threats these pose for us, and for the groups we support. We also identify the “bottom-up agenda” of local groups by formal and informal feedback and through our networking activities. We then look at what we need to do to respond to these and what capacity building, resources, organisational development etc is needed internally to enable us to do so. We try to be 12 months or so ahead of the game if we can in anticipating developments locally and nationally…also in trying to be innovative in developing new approaches and initiatives”.

“My view is that the voluntary sector is not about mainstream social service provision. It’s about doing innovative things: it’s about change, it’s about the critique”.

However, there are also tensions and concerns about the non-profit sector becoming too similar to, particularly public sector agencies and in being subsumed into a larger mainly governmental agenda, which is perceived to affect the image and status of the sector:
“I think for the sector it’s the issues of independence of the sector and [being perceived as] the third arm of the State. And it’s how far the objectives of the [LDAs] are allied with central government objectives and what the implications are long term…It’s changing the way they do things and how that’s going to pan out over the next few years is going to be important”.

While this might be seen as positive – “it’s quite nice when government catches up with your thinking at times” - it also means that managers need to be clear in the roles and relationships they have with significant stakeholders such as governmental funders.

“I understand what the government’s proposition to the voluntary sector is, if you like. Therefore, I think I’m in a good position to understand what the opportunities for the sector are, which aren’t necessarily the same. But then I’m also, because of my political skills as opposed to my interest in politics, I’m in quite a strong position to broker that”.

Here, the central role of the manager is brought in to focus and so far, what we’ve seen is an outer-directed (Anheier, 2000) dimension (see Fig. 2) to the managerial role, working with ambiguity, change and shifting stages of engagement with other actors, which requires knowledge of and an ability to act and interact on a number of levels.

**Take in Fig.2: Practice Focus**
Indeed, the more internally focused processes of work design and day-to-day management responsibilities were not the key drivers for some managers:

“\textit{I wouldn’t want to go into an organisation just to manage it. I’d want to go into an organisation to change its strategic direction…I get very frustrated with all the, you know, the organisational industrial stuff, it just drains my energy…I don’t see myself managing a steady state organisation}.”

Where there was a focus on internal arrangements, this was often where managers had recently moved into a role where the previous incumbent was perceived to have had “problems” or had “missed” key issues, or because of crisis or sudden growth. For example:

“The organisational managerial demands on the job have risen significantly. But at the same time, I’ve had to do my best to develop the role, build the infrastructure within the organisation to cope with that. In terms of senior line management, in terms of development, planning, co-ordination and in terms of servicing, you know, administrative, IT servicing and so on…That’s made big demands on my time and energy to make sure that we have the systems within the organisation to cope with this growth”

“This is a critical issue that comes about…partly as a result of growth in the organisation and the HR management function is now quite substantial. I mean the overall responsibility of it falls on me, but with forty staff heading towards sixty within a year, it’s no longer sustainable for the chief executive to still be the personnel manager!”
As we can see, fluctuation in the numbers of employees has both an effect on the structure and processes within the organisation, but also on the strategic tenacity of individual managers. There are shifting external factors with which managers need not only to engage and respond, but also to anticipate and even shape. As “public” bodies, there are a range of “interested” people and accountable bodies with which to interact. Internally, there can be a number of different contractual arrangements with employees, with volunteers, with service providers and while there may be a finance manager, departmental managers and team leaders, there is often little in the way of infrastructural support and development opportunities for the chief executive. Even where LDAs offer training, this is often externally focused as a service to other organisations.

In responding to what Schön (1987, p 36) might refer to an “indeterminate zones of practice”, and linking back to a need to become fluent in mainstream management-speak, local development agency chief executives also have to become “quick-change artists”, which can be both exhilarating and stressful:

“I was in London and I had some spare time so I went to have a sort of semi-work, semi-catch-up lunch with another chief exec of another national organisation. Went to her office and she was cleaning out the fridge – on her knees, cleaning out the fridge because someone spilt the milk. And, as she said – that’s the job of the chief exec and yeah, that actually right. I mean you have to do everything from cleaning out the fridge to argue with government ministers and that’s the appeal really”.

Page 14 of 34
“I mean, I think you’re a bit of a chameleon really”.

The expert practitioner, then, is not only bi-lingual but also multi-lingual. They learn the art of modal participation, that is “the ability to play various roles in various fields of participation” where learning “implies becoming a different person” in different situations, contexts and in different sets of interrelationships and “to ignore this aspect of learning is to overlook the fact that learning involves the construction of identities.” (Lave and Wenger, 1999, p 20 and 53) (See Fig. 3).

**Take in Fig. 3: Shifting roles and identities**

This ability to shift focus and cope with multifarious fields of participation, may also suggest the potential for a fusion, a blurring of boundaries between what is “internal” to the organisation, and what is “external” shown in this statement by a chief executive:

> “And so it doesn’t matter what the government throws at us in terms of a variety of different things. All of them go into that filter and I say, well, what in that government idea is about changing people’s lives for the better? And if it’s not about that, we just ignore it”.

Here, we can see that while this manager is strategically open to governmental (and other) factors, these are “filtered” in through an interpretation of aims and values. If they resonate at this fundamental level – have “structural congruence” (Maturana and Varela, 1998, p 95) - then they become part of the manager’s world, otherwise they are seen to be irrelevant to thinking and action.
What we need to consider is how this happens, whether it is purposeful (as this example suggests, even with the benefit of retrospective sensemaking (Weick, 1995)), or spontaneous. And, if as Clancey and Sierhus (1996) propose “we understand the dynamics of the activity”, then “we understand that changing it will change the knowledge and the learning”. Furthermore, that “we will have a better way to manage the knowledge and learning”, and contribute to developing appropriate support and learning opportunities for non-profit managers.

Developing non-profit managers

While apparent success as a manager may be somewhat dependent on the exploitation of “technical knowledge and managerial concepts”, Smith (2001, p 35) also contends that success comes from “an understanding of, and feel for, such factors as organisational politics and culture, the art of influencing others, the ability to delegate, the skills of timing, presentation and selling ideas”. Furthermore, Johnson (2000, p 403) makes a distinction between the “world of synthetic reason and logic” and the “cultural and political world of management practice”, suggesting, “the models of the former are well, rehearsed, explicit and readily available”.

The idea of “success” in this instance seems to suggest a prescriptive approach of competences and skills development, which in various ways can be imparted to individuals to improve their management styles and abilities. A view, which Cacioppe (1997, p 340) contends fits with the world of management and leadership education in that “the more a person learns, the more he or she knows and the better they will be as a leader”. It also suggests a more internal organisation focus.

Comment [MCB16]: So Myers has convinced us that the managers of non-profits cannot develop the skills needed for non-profit work in the traditional manner of business managers. Rather, something different is required. Let’s see what she says about how they should be developed – at least as it is reflected in this study. It has taken her 16 pages to get to the part on which she probably fully intended to focus. That isn’t a criticism; it is just what it takes to explain everything fully.
Yet, Baumard (1999) suggests that success lies more in “top managers’ ability to use tacit knowledge than in their gaining or updating explicit knowledge”. This “practical and social wisdom” or “phronesis” (ibid1999; Czarniawska, 2001) is part of a process of experiential learning: a contextual or situated knowledge. Similarly, Alvesson and Wilmott (1996, p 28) suggest that “acquiring abstract techniques and skills is comparatively easy; establishing and maintaining the power and authority that supports their effective application in specific contexts presents challenges of a completely different order”.

If, as Clancey (1995) explains, “situated learning…is a theory about the nature of human knowledge, claiming that knowledge is dynamically constructed as we perceive what is happening to us, talk and move”, then through context related learning, building “communities of practice” (Lave and Wenger, 1999) and learning networks, practitioners can meet. They can discover what they think, compare sources of information and different perceptions, take time to develop thinking and reflection, generate outcomes and infer or articulate a more global view of events; their “habitus” (Bourdieu, 1977; MacMillan, 2002). This may align with what Weick (2001, p 136) refers to as abilities to affiliate, triangulate, deliberate, effectuate and consolidate. This seems to resonate with the “prevailing opinion…that individual leadership capacity cannot be increased solely using traditional academic methods” (Bolton and Abdy, 2003)

If we look at chief executives of LDAs more closely, we start to see variety of behaviours and actions shaped by experience of “being” a manager in this
context. Of the respondents interviewed, most had worked in the voluntary sector for five years or more and had been chief executives of LDAs for between one year and over fifteen years. All had some form of higher education – if not graduate education, then master’s level vocational degrees (for example, MA/qualified social worker) and master’s of business administration.

While most saw themselves as long-term voluntary sector people, having arrived often by accident via a number of routes – volunteering, political affiliation, from public sector, or from industry – there was acknowledgement of constraints in career development. Yet, at the same time, most had arrived at a senior management position in their 20s and early 30s:

“I remember once joking with a guy from university who said that there were no career ladders in the voluntary sector. And I said, yes, actually, there are loads of career ladders but the problem is they’re all very short. You can reach the top of your chosen niche by the time you’re in your late twenties”.

So continuous learning, development, seeking out education, and learning opportunities is not always about promotion and career progression for people in this position. Indeed, Bolton and Abdy (2003, p 23) cite Kotter’s (1990) key factors evidenced in those who achieved leadership positions, which are of interest here: “significant leadership challenge early in their career (i.e. in their 20s and early 30s)” and “lateral career moves” - widening the breadth of experience and (personal) networks. Harrison and Kessels (2004, p 101) cite Mumford et al’s (1987) research “into learning processes undergone by successful directors of business” which gave weight to on-the-
job experience and role models as opposed to formal learning. In some instances, for LDA directors, there is even a certain amount of cynicism connected with what are perceived to be traditional routes to increased managerial know-how:

“It (MBA) is a bit of proof but it’s not convincing. I mean a lot of people will tell you that someone with an MBA is proof of the opposite, they’re a bloody awful manager, but no, I still feel I’m not the manager I would like to be…people are managed in a different ethos”.

“I’m quite cynical about management training and I’m very cynical about the MBA route, which is often the route that voluntary sector people go down…because mostly people I know who’ve done it are hopeless managers. It doesn’t seem to have affected their practice at all”.

“And I’ve seen them go away to college and learn in formal education … they come back and they’ve lost the edge, you know. They’ve lost the kind of soul for the job”.

What we also need to consider at this point is personal and organisational commitment to supporting learning at this level. While there are many instances citing lack of resources (finance, time, lack of capacity of the organisation to cover for training off-site), the context and circumstances in which CEOs in LDAs are working can also mean a pressure to concentrate on spending money on direct services. Also how are managers approaching their work and how reflective are they in their need for support and
development? Are managers so overloaded with information and the need to act that they are overwhelmed, reacting to the greatest pressure? Are they technically competent in keeping their head above the water - coping with the different demands and pressures? Are they performing - fulfilling the aims and objectives of the organisation and hitting targets? Are they "thinking about [their] actions and analysing them in a critical manner", with the purpose of learning to improve their professional practice”? (Baumard, 1999, p 96). Are they creating opportunities to learn – “seeking exposure within their job, aiming to make the most out of the learning resources and opportunities they have available and taking personal initiative? (See Fig. 4).

**Take in Fig. 4 Managerial behaviours & responses**

Depending on what “level” managers are operating, perceived skills gaps might determine an “appropriate” intervention. So, what might be relevant at the beginning of their career – developing the skills and abilities to supervise and manage staff, produce budgets, strategic and development planning - may be accessed through short courses, structured events specifically, but not necessarily always, designed for non-profits. The perceived “know-how” in managing themselves in different situations, becoming voluntary sector managers and particularly local development agency chief executives – i.e. “becoming a practitioner not learning about practice” (Brown and Duguid, 1991, p 48, authors’ italics) may require a “multi-faceted approach, and not the use of ready-made management models carried over from the business world or public management” (Anheier, 2000, p 8).

In terms of competencies and perceived need for successful managers to move from reacting to certainly performing, this may be addressed by
providing “management” development and education (the bread and butter of many business schools). The less clear-cut areas of learning and creativity, which no doubt impact on performance, may be more about what is perceived as supporting “leadership” potential (a developing area of interest for public and non-profit sectors and the practice of some universities in their links into corporate and public sectors).

What’s missing in exploring these issues in terms of non-profit experience in the UK, has been “an almost total absence…of a ready-made or generally accepted management discourse for voluntary organisations (Batsleer, 1995, p 225) compared to say, North America. Yet, J.P. Smith (2000) feels it is important to stress, “just how young the field of non-profit management education is in the United States”. While this is changing in the UK and there are notable providers of information, education and training at executive levels, there is still the vexed question of whether the sector is sufficiently different from other sectors to warrant separate management education provision. Yet, part of the problem here is that by remaining ‘outside’ current structures and programmes there is little influence to change the mode of operation of business and management education and the view of non-profit management and leadership as being “other than the norm”. On the other hand, it might be that while traditional business and management courses “ignore” non-profits both at undergraduate (for instance, how many undergraduate students on sandwich courses have non-for-profit sector placements?) and post-graduate levels, it is pertinent to provide “alternative” arrangements. Current consultation papers for the sector on skills development, for example, include the provision for a “leadership and management hub” for the sector as well as looking at local and regional support networks (VSNTO, 2003).
Part of the remit for such a hub is also seen as encouraging take up of development opportunities by the sector. There are a number of chief executives who are choosing not to take up postgraduate courses in non-profit studies, preferring instead other options including more specialised areas such as leadership “fellowships”. Some are opting out of formal provision altogether – not because they do not appreciate the need to learn, what Antonacopoulou (2001, p 223) would refer to as mathaphobic managers, but because they perceive their learning, for various reasons, to be “beyond” what's on offer:

“Once you get to a certain level frankly you've had a bellyful of short courses – it's not at a sophisticated enough level to answer the questions that you have as somebody managing and doing partnerships and working up contracts and all the rest of it”.

What we may be seeing in relation to LDA chief executives - operating at this fairly sophisticated level (not all agencies and/or individuals do) - is what Södergren and Söderholm (2001, p 248) refer to as “knowledge-intensive work”. This requires “constant and informal learning” which, in turn may be as much about interacting with “others in the same professional areas” (Stein, 2001, p 213) as being sent off to learn (Huysman, 2001). For LDA chief executives the communities of practice may well be the other chief executives in their field, but it is also as much about the different communities of which they are a part, particularly the multi-disciplinary, cross-sector partnerships and coalitions and these do seem to provide for learning in situ and for personal support:
“You go along to your first partnership meeting and you haven’t got a clue. You go to the second with a little bit more. You do a load of reading and by the third - you’re an expert”.

“We can get a bit insular sometimes, although I have a lot of contact with managers locally, not involved in [the local development agency], obviously nationally you tend to network a bit in your own back yard as it were. I think it’s quite useful sometimes to be able to touch base with other people struggling with management issues but perhaps from a perspective of an organisation trying to deliver different kinds of service”.

So, what’s emerging is the sense of networked practitioners – using both the tight networks of their own “back yard” but also the looser connections – those people with technical knowledge when required, others with more strategic awareness:

“There are one or two guys in the health service scene – very senior people…that I think are quite visionaries in their own kind of way…I occasionally get…reassurance from them that I’m going in the right direction”.

Here we see people seeking out significant others “to develop and improve themselves as being resourceful, self-directed, inquisitive and creative in their approach to learning” (Antonacopoulou, 2001, p 223-224); often working from the periphery of practice to become immersed over time and relying on abduction (Pierce cited in Böje, 2001, p 50) to make sense of their worlds. In some instances, there are parallels with findings from a survey of “directors
who were known for their innovative approaches” (cited in Holbeche, 2002, p 203) where much of this sense-making activity takes place outside of work. Where Holbeche describes these activities as “innocuous and seemingly unrelated activities”, we could also construe such activities as opportunities for reflexive practice and therefore as more purposeful. While chief executives of LDAs engaged in such activities while running, contemplating in the back garden with a glass of wine or while driving to and from work, some also engaged in more directed sensemaking:

“When I accept speaking engagements I very often use those to explore things that I'm thinking about”.

This need for an analytical framework is also something that was commented on by Holbeche (2002, p 17) in relation to the strategic role of HR practitioners albeit with an internal organisational focus. As chief executives in LDAs often lack this support within the organisation, this may be increasingly why they are looking to external sources through meetings with fellow officers, through action learning, external supervision and mentoring:

“My chair is great but not really in a position to give me my line management support so the board agreed for me to buy in that support and I talk about issues with her…about every six to eight weeks”.

“Just recently I’ve formed a close dialogue with counterparts [in neighbouring counties], simply because we discovered more or less by accident at the chief executives’ meeting last year, that we were
grappling with a lot of the same issues, so we now meet every three or four months”.

“I’ve just begun to develop an action learning set for five voluntary sector chief executives including myself and the five of us are very excited about that”.

This is also a slight divergence from looking at learning networks and communities of practice as purely workplace based (Harrison and Kessels, 2004) and also where the artificial split between “internal” organisation and “external” environment is problematic since much of the learning for these managers is taking place outside their own organisations with senior managers and leaders from other sectors, through partnership arrangements.

**Challenges of and responses to developing managers.**

There is a range of short courses available to voluntary sector managers and there are some non-profit research and practice-oriented units and centres within universities. There are also a number of independent consultants specialising in personal and organisational development in the sector. In addition, key national organisations are providing information and access to research; development and networking opportunities, as well as technical resources such as, legal and financial management and training for trustees.

Yet, as a national director points out:

“The lack of management training, management support is an issue for the sector as a whole and certainly an issue for the [LDAs]. If you look at the voluntary sector national training organisation, their relatively recent report…says that one of the gaps is management
skills, management training and I think that’s reflected in chief officers [wanting] something for them, focussed on their needs”.

This report brings to the fore technical know-how and skills. Whereas the picture being assembled in this paper is one that looks – particularly for long-serving practitioners – at more experientially based approaches to learning:

“What I’ve never really done is actually spent some time with them [public service and private sector counterparts] trying in a structured way to learn what they are – what their motivation is, what their philosophies are, or their approaches or the constraints and parameters they work within. Though I think I know a lot of them, or understand some of them just from observing, maybe spending time like that would be useful” [Secondment]

“It would have to be the right people so that it can be reciprocated. I tried [and was matched] with this guy from [well known high street bank]. I met him once and it was a bit of a waste of time really because he was a business manager in a branch and managed like two hundred business accounts. And he was in a system that was so rigid, so set down…And I was trying to explain to him that it’s a bit different to my world, you know”. [Mentoring]

“The […] leadership fellowship is a useful mechanism…trying to replicate that on a more, not local but say regional basis would be useful”. [Leaders/aspiring leader networks]
“What I would like the opportunity to do is maybe to have some week-long sessions, which were cheap. And which the organisation could afford that would actually improve my performance in certain areas and give me some additional skills to be a better manager…the opportunity to sit down and actually consider collectively how you might tackle a particular project, a particular strategy, look at it from different angles”. [Anticipatory learning]

“I think probably now I’d like someone to come along and say, well, you know actually you could so with some training in these areas – perhaps some kind of consultancy really – come along and say well, yes, these are areas where we think we can help you to improve your performance”. [Individual consultancy]

“I find the research methods are sort of important as well, you know, again dealing with the public sector so much…you suddenly realise how little of what is done [in voluntary sector] is actually based on any sort of research or based on any factual knowledge that it might work”. [Research and inquiry based learning]

“I will need somebody who understands at that level…facilitating the thinking” [Facilitation and coaching]

CEOs also mentioned the need for long-term modular approach to include both formal learning and validation of managerial experience, which could be developed and added to over time (and accredited by an academic institution to give some kind of academic award – or a professional body for the sector?). Also, there needs to be consideration of learning for personal and
organisational needs and capturing the cross-sector partnership learning of both processes and outcomes. This takes us back to working on the strategic roles and diversity of tasks of local development agency chief executives (the “what”) in order to “improve the how’s and discuss the why’s” (Huysman, 2001, p 87) and, as we can see from Fig. 5, a focus on the issues contained within the dotted lines. It is here where we need to think critically about the ways in which learning for non-profit managers is facilitated and supported.

Take in Fig. 5 developing Managers

Where does this take us?

This debate is not new and flexible approaches to learning and critical pedagogy are in evidence within learning institutions, what is not necessarily included is a non-profit dimension in mainstream management education both at an undergraduate level and for adult learning. Moreover, Rafo et al (2000, p 262) purport that “critical forays launched by management development educationalists” still suggest, “that classic undergraduate, postgraduate and other VET business programmes do little to enhance real business acumen and real business skills. They suggest instead the need to make greater use of action learning theories and approaches”. It will be interesting to see the results of a three-year programme of action learning for non-profit managers and aspiring managers currently being run by NACVS (the National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service).

Perhaps where there are signs of more inclusion of non-profit dimensions are in more specialist or vocational areas such as social work, public health education and public sector management where there are a number of community-based and non-profit provider-based practice environments and it
is here were most inter-agency work is concentrated. There is some inclusion in other professional areas for example law and accounting where there are accounting practices “peculiar” to charitable companies.

Taking on board the lessons learned from development of non-profit education in North America (where it is most advanced) may continue to develop dialogue around organically grown senior management training and the need for competencies based frameworks (Hudson, and Bruce and Leat respectively cited in Clutterbuck and Dearlove 1996, p 94) in response to management training needs. And if it means to be inclusive, management education has to take on board that non-profit sector managers have something to give to that process, that learning is not just from private to public to non-profit: it is a three-way process. Perhaps, then, continuing to learn from the experience of business schools who, although are working mainly with the private sector organisations, are experimenting with different approaches to developing managers (see for example Gold and Holman, 2001) may start to provide space for non-profit experience. As Osborne (1996, p 207) suggests in his review of training needs for the voluntary sector “the ideal appeared to be programmes which took the best [sic] practice from this [mainstream] tradition and integrated it into a voluntary context”.

Yet, management education is not the same as management development and management learning and maybe, as some of the LDA CEOs’ comments illustrate this is situated somewhere other than in academic institutions. In 1996, Osborne was looking at industry training standards, NVQs and working at a locality level through Training and Enterprise Councils. The Voluntary Sector National Training Organisation has been brought into existence and
the Sector Skills and Learning and Skills Councils are starting to include workforce development issues for the non-profit sector.

The probable instigation of a Leadership and Management Hub for the sector seeks to raise the profile of the sector and to understand the leadership requirements through research and through working with providers to deliver the programmes that meet the needs of the sector. In order to do this, we need to incorporate the lived experiences of non-profit managers. For some LDA chief executives this is at the interface between voluntary, private and public sectors. By observing (and researching) these executives in action, we can inform and deepen management discourse by including views from the non-profit sector. If pressure continues for public sector organisations and private sector organisations to work in partnership with each other and with non-profit organisations, this may also provide useful insights into the development and leadership aspects of working at this interface and encourage cross-sector learning - the challenge being how to capture this learning on a routine basis? Maybe this gives increased opportunities to build on some of the community based work carried out by a number of academic institutions and to draw some of this learning back in to inform the development and delivery of mainstream programmes, but that’s another paper…

References


Butler, R. J. and Wilson, D. C. (1990), Managing Voluntary and Non-Profit Organisations, Routledge, London


Clancey, W. J. and Sierhuis, M. (1996), Knowledge, Practice, Activities and People in AAAI Spring Symposium on Artificial Intelligence in Knowledge Management

Czarniawska, B. (2001), "Is it possible to be a Constructionist Consultant?", *Management Learning*, 32 No 2, pp253-266.


Maturana, H. R. and Varela, F. J. (1998, Revised), The Tree of Knowledge: the biological roots of human understanding, Shambala, Boston, MA


Myers, J and Sacks, R (2003), "Tools, Techniques and Tightropes: The art of walking and talking private sector management in non-profit organisations, is it just a question of balance?", Financial Accountability and Management, 19 No 3 pp 287-304


Watson, T.J. and Harris, P (1999), The Emergent Manager, Sage, London


Further reading