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# Evaluating Management and Leadership Development: New Ideas and Practical Approaches

Key research findings

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# 1 Introduction

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This paper presents the key learning points from an IES HR Network project on the evaluation of management and leadership development. This project was undertaken in response to interest from the Network members, who find the evaluation of management learning interventions an important area, but one in which good practice is not so easy to find. A fuller project report will be published at the end of the research, as will a series of case study examples of particular evaluation exercises.

## 1.1 The theory-practice gap in evaluating management and leadership development

The evaluation of management and leadership development (M&LD for short) is an area in which the theory-practice gap seems especially wide. The Kirkpatrick model (1983) still dominates how practitioners think about evaluating learning, and its four levels of impact (Reaction, Learning, Behaviour, Results) are still an extremely useful start point. But the very success of this model seems to constrain how many practitioners think about evaluation. This, combined with the heavy emphasis placed in the literature and at conferences on Return on Investment in training (ROI), seems to have left many practitioners feeling ill equipped to tackle evaluation. The perceived inability to carry out a 'perfect' evaluation in either Kirkpatrick (level 4) terms or ROI can easily become an excuse for not evaluating management learning very seriously at all. 'If you can't do it properly, why do it at all?' seems to be the implicit state of play in many organisations.

Many employers use simple feedback sheets after learning events, often rather derogatorily called 'happy sheets'. They also occasionally carry out more in-depth work, especially when re-tendering for a major programme provider or when senior people ask how well the money has been spent – which incidentally they do not seem to do all that often. Sophisticated evaluation projects on large scale public sector leadership programmes have been frequent in the last few years.

This has been partly in response to the clear need to show value for public money. IES has been involved in a good number of such projects.

This research has therefore focused very strongly on evaluation *practice*, as that seems to be the real area of unease for organisations.

### 1.2 Research approach

We have collected a set of over 30 specific evaluation projects and dissected them in some detail. A good many of these have been conducted by IES over recent years or by organisations or individuals with working links with IES. A large trawl of the literature was also conducted to find real examples of M&LD evaluations, with enough detail to explain how they were conducted and what results they found. Examples were chosen across different types of management learning and including some broader OD interventions, where these were seeking to influence leadership behaviour.

Visits and phone calls with HR/L&D professionals in employing organisations were also used to gain a better overview of current practice as well as to find their specific examples and innovative solutions. The broader literature of theory and practice in M&LD has been used to present some useful ideas and show how the field is moving. Tamkin, Yarnall and Kerri (2002) present a more detailed overview of the literature on evaluating training.

### 1.3 The challenges of evaluating management and leadership development

Many of the discussions in the course of this project explored why evaluating M&LD is not an easy task. So before adopting a relentlessly positive approach to what you *can* do, it is worth looking these challenges straight in the eye. Viewing these challenges as factors to take into account will help you conduct more thoughtful evaluations.

- Management development and L&D functions are under pressure to deliver more with less. Practitioners wish to evaluate but don't want to spend much resource on doing so, as there is then less to spend on training delivery. Some experts claim that 10 per cent of a development intervention's budget should go into evaluating it. HR and L&D professionals have the power to budget for evaluation but do not often do so.
- There is a desire within the development function to show value for money – and indeed to examine effectiveness of development more broadly – but we found a surprising lack of real pressure from business stakeholders to require evaluation of management development spend. The private sector seems to be

more willing to invest in management learning as an act of faith than the public sector. Providers, such as business schools, find purchasers of management development very unwilling to commission evaluation.

- There is also some concern in HR quarters that evaluation may turn out to be very critical of the effectiveness of management learning interventions. As a leading business school said *'They want to be clean, but they do not want to be washed'*.
- It is extremely difficult to show clear cause and effect in M&LD. Timescales of the training are sometimes extended and timescales of impact on individuals can last many years. Management learning and its application can easily be affected by external factors changing at the same time, such as reorganisations or changes in business strategies.
- Measuring leaders 'before' an intervention can be difficult if you don't know exactly what change might take place. How do you know what to measure? Again this is different from training courses aimed at defined tasks or skills, where the 'before' assessment can be more straightforward.
- M&LD has moved towards more complex interventions. They can be prolonged, include several modules of events or formal training and also often include more personalised forms of support such as coaching, mentoring, learning sets and so on. This kind of development is a long way from a short course with clear objectives and results which can be quickly measured.
- If longer-term evaluations are attempted it can be difficult to get participants in development interventions to support these when they feel quite removed in time from the activity being evaluated.
- Different aspects of a single programme may not work equally well with different people, who may have very different attitudes and learning styles.
- We do not often have control groups in management training which are comparable, so we cannot often easily compare those who have received training with those who have not.
- The impact of leadership development does not necessarily follow a linear path from a training input to acquired knowledge and skill, to behaviour and thence to business results. A lot of leadership development is much more about an inner journey of ideas, feelings and self-awareness. The idea of 'double loop learning' applies to a lot of M&LD both to the deeper change learning can make to individuals and also how change in organisations can affect deeper values and principles, not just planned outcomes.

- M&LD is increasingly taking place in the context of OD and change management interventions. Here the goals are overtly organisational and individual leadership development may be a spin off from an intervention pitched at a more specific organisational change in culture or ways of working.

The rest of this paper presents the key findings as follows:

- Ideas which experienced evaluators use when approaching the design of an evaluation exercise (Chapter 2).
- Useful practices, presented in order of increasing sophistication (Chapter 3).
- Conclusions and tips for practitioners (Chapter 4).



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## 2 Thinking About Evaluation: Where to Start?

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Designing an evaluation can be daunting. So how do you start thinking about a particular evaluation you wish to conduct? Interviewing experienced evaluators, we found that they seem to use some common ideas – not necessarily in exactly the same order but often present near the start of an evaluation exercise.

In this chapter we present five ideas which help in designing an evaluation:

- the aims and purposes of the development
- the purposes of the evaluation
- stakeholders in the evaluation
- using the design of the intervention to identify likely kinds and levels of impact
- exploring cause and effect.

### 2.1 Aims and purposes of the development intervention

It is worth starting with aims of the development intervention itself. These can be extremely varied *eg* knowledge or skills to be acquired; improved career development (in many talent management programmes); culture change linked to leadership behaviour; OD; improving working relationships (as in some top team development); improving problem solving; increasing innovation *etc.*

We often need to think more widely about what the learning is trying to do than about the simple Kirkpatrick chain centred on the link between knowledge/skills and individual performance and then impact on the business.

Evaluations should also question the learning needs of the managers involved. Much delivery of M&LD can be quite formulaic, based on rather standardised ideas of what managers and leaders need to learn. Good evaluations often

challenge this and find out about context-specific learning needs. This is critical to aligning M&LD to business needs.

## 2.2 Purposes of the evaluation: WHY are we evaluating?

Experienced evaluators ask more questions right at the start about what the organisation wants from the evaluation. Is it a summative evaluation – basically trying to prove that development has ‘worked’? Or is it a formative evaluation, aimed at improving how the development takes place? For all the talk of ROI (a ‘proving’ idea), the purpose of most evaluation is really formative: ‘if we do this again, how could we make it more effective?’

**Table 2.1: The purposes of evaluation**

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

*Source: Easterby-Smith, 1994*

As shown in Table 2.1, the distinction between evaluating process and outcome is also a helpful one. Evaluation is often interested both in how learning is facilitated (processes) as well as its impact (outcomes). Most often we are in the ‘improving’ part of this model (the bottom left hand) and want to make sure the process works well as well as showing outcomes where we can (up in the top right hand).

### 2.2.1 Resources for the evaluation

While we are thinking about the purpose of an evaluation, it is also sensible to consider practical resources:

- How long do we have for the evaluation?
- What time or money can we spend on it?
- Are we using internal or external evaluators and what kind of capability do they have?

### 2.2.2 Decisions that the evaluation will inform

A related and useful idea is that of evaluation focused on its use to inform decisions (Patton, 1997). This suggests that any evaluation project should be client focused and start by asking who the client is, what decision they want to make

better in the light of the evaluation, and then design data collection, analysis and reporting to make evidence based recommendations that are as good as possible within the constraints of resources and time.

## 2.3 Stakeholders: WHO is the evaluation for and who should it involve?

Thinking about purposes and decisions often leads naturally to thinking about who is interested in this evaluation. Whose views will be important? Who will be using the findings and what will they want from them? If decisions will be made, who will be making them? What are the issues they need to have addressed? What will count as 'successful' development from their perspective?

Burgoyne (1994) suggests a multi-stakeholder approach to evaluation, which takes into account multiple stakeholders with both aligning and conflicting interests. Considering stakeholders in this way recognises and makes explicit the political nature of evaluation.

Sometimes we can see a clear 'main agenda' linked to the explicit purposes of the development, but then also subsidiary agendas, often reflecting interests of other stakeholders. Several sets of interests can be included in the content of what is examined.

We should also consider who is in a position to see the impact of M&LD. These stakeholders are likely to include not just the individual and their boss, but their subordinates, often their peers (as in 360 degree viewpoints), maybe their customers, and also the learning facilitators, those involved in projects *etc.*

Table 2.2 below relates the aims of evaluation to typical stakeholders interested in three common types of aim. Adding the 'reviewing' aim into the earlier model of purposes, includes the reflection of learners themselves as one aspect of an evaluation.

**Table 2.2: Types of evaluation useful to different stakeholders**

Aims	Type	Key focus	Key beneficiaries
<b>Reviewing</b>	Personal learning review	Personal reflection	Participants
<b>Improving</b>	Satisfaction/impact assessment	Perceptions of usefulness	Course designers & deliverers
<b>Proving</b>	Impact assessment	Behavioural & business outcomes	Sponsors/organisation management

*Source: Ben Reid, The Work Foundation, 2011*

These two central ideas of the purposes of an evaluation and the stakeholders in it combine to form a strong start point for designing what information you are going to collect, from whom and for whose use.

## 2.4 Working from the learning intervention design: WHAT processes? WHERE will we look for impact?

The other common start point used by experienced evaluators is the component parts of the development intervention, for example a course versus a learning set or some personal coaching.

We expect to inquire into such specific components of a complex intervention as well as assessing its overall impact. Different kinds of questions may be important for each component of the intervention. For example, a developmental project will lend itself to questions about whether it was a sensible project to undertake, how each stage worked, whether the organisational support for it was adequate, what were its results and how did the company use them *etc.* For coaching, questions about goals set or the relationship with the coach might be important.

More recent approaches to M&LD tend to emphasise self-management of learning alongside some facilitation, as in learning sets for example. Here suitable questions include: Is the group in the room together a suitable one? Is the right stuff being discussed? Is the discussion well facilitated?

The design of the intervention does not just help with process questions but with ones about outcomes as well. It can also help us to think about where impact might be visible. For example, development pitched at better strategic vision is likely to show up in the discussions team subordinates have with their manager about their team, and possibly also individual, goals.

The 'visualised benefit' approach describes how the evaluator can try to identify the likely kinds of impact an intervention might reasonably have – and then to keep these in mind during the evaluation.

If we are seeking to measure the financial benefit of learning, we also need to consider where that may show up. Are there any business or financial metrics we already have or can easily collect which can pick up change in performance?

### 2.4.1 Impact at different levels

The notion of 'levels' of impact can also be of value in design. Development can have an impact at the level of the:

- individual

- team
- unit, *eg* department, division, function *etc.*
- whole organisation or beyond, *eg* profession, sector, community *etc.*

Levels of impact (individual and organisational), combined with stakeholders and data sources form the basis of the IES model for evaluating coaching (Carter, 2006).

## 2.5 Exploring the nature of cause and effect

In management learning, the chains of cause and effect are, in themselves, not well understood and a legitimate focus for enquiry. Improved understanding is an important purpose of evaluation.

The ‘visualised benefit’ approach, referred to above, can be used explicitly with clients and stakeholders by asking them to discuss likely cause and effect and identify the benefits/impact of development they hope or expect to see. This encourages discussion of possible cause and effect linkages.

Psychological impacts of development, such as confidence and motivation, often act as intervening variables between a development experience and job performance. For example, coaching may have its main effect through confidence-building just as much as skill acquisition. It can be helpful therefore to include standard measures of various psychological constructs in evaluation surveys, so that their link with other outcomes can be explored.

While practitioners have continued to wrestle with the problems of evaluating management learning, academic debate became rather unhelpfully polarised between overly mechanistic models of cause and effect (from the logical positivist camp, including those heavily into ROI) and the proposition that all reality is socially constructed so we can’t deduce much at all from evaluation (the post-modernist camp). At long last theory is hauling itself to the place where sensible practitioners have been for many years and has given a name to it – critical realism. Applied to the evaluation of M&LD this acknowledges that we are looking at a complex process which is experienced differently by different individuals and affected by environmental factors. However when we see similar patterns of experience and impact emerging then we can make ‘reasonable inferences’ about what is going on (Burgoyne, 2011). At heart, that is what we are doing when we evaluate management learning.

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## 3 Doing Evaluation: Useful Practices

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With the ideas explored in Chapter 2 in mind, what might we do well or differently as we conduct our evaluations?

This chapter focuses on some useful practices which come into play as we get more searching in our approach to evaluation. We look at:

- setting objectives and planning any evaluation exercise
- how to use simple approaches, including reaction questionnaires, more effectively
- various approaches to more in-depth evaluations
- identifying the impacts of M&LD
- what do about Return on Investment (ROI)
- integrating evaluation into learning.

### 3.1 Setting objectives and planning for evaluation

The ideas of evaluation purpose and the design of the intervention itself can be used to set objectives for the evaluation. What is the evaluation for? Is it setting out to 'prove' or 'improve' or both? What are you going to find out about? Are there some expected outcomes you need to look for? Are there aspects of cause and effect or learning need you want to understand better?

The stakeholder perspective can add to this agenda by highlighting other issues or concerns some stakeholders may want examined. It can also identify who is in the best position to evaluate impacts and whether there are other stakeholders whose views you also wish to collect. This usually leads quite quickly to a list of people or groups to involve in even a simple evaluation.

Once you are clearer about the objectives of the evaluation it can be useful to agree these explicitly with your key internal customers.

Your early thinking about decisions, timeframe and resources can be used to draw up a simple plan for the evaluation. This ensures that enough attention is given to data analysis and reporting as well as to data collection. IES often found that companies had collected interesting evaluation data but had not 'got round' to analysing it very carefully. This was sometimes a matter of capability (*eg* statistical analysis skills or software), but was more often a lack of time or priority.

## 3.2 Using simple approaches more effectively

### 3.2.1 Re-positioning and extending Kirkpatrick

As we have seen above, you do not need to consider the four Kirkpatrick levels as a hierarchy and this was not the intention of the model (Kirkpatrick, 1996). Evaluation at 'reaction' level is not necessarily inferior and ROI does not have to be your Holy Grail. An evaluation can usefully collect information at a range of the Kirkpatrick 'levels'.

In some circumstances, it can help to extend the range of effects identified in Kirkpatrick. For example: even before we get to the 'reaction' level, we might like to know something about the 'reach' of an intervention (the pattern of take-up within the target population). The behavioural level of impact can be widened to look at the 'application' of learning back in the job. The organisational impact can differentiate between impact at team level, at unit level and more systemically throughout the organisation (see section 2.4). Such ideas can help to frame specific evaluation questions you will ask.

### 3.2.2 Consciously using and building on informal methods

In developing the use of evaluation, one approach is to work from the kind of informal evaluation which always takes place whether you decide to do it or not. Here we mean the chats at events in the breaks, sometimes at the start or end of sessions, and also how people talk about the intervention with their work colleagues and managers and the trainers/ facilitators.

Listening to such informal comments and discussion will nearly always frame questions which you might then wish to explore more systematically.

This informal, light touch evaluation can often be improved, for example by evaluators/designers attending events and observing or having short feedback discussions at suitable moments in events. This can also help participant

reflection, for example discussing the day before first thing in the morning of the next day. If such discussions are held, they can be captured quite simply.

### 3.2.3 Improving the simplest surveys, including ‘happy sheets’

Nearly all the organisations involved in this study used some kind of simple reaction survey or ‘happy sheet’, often completed at the end of an event or shortly afterwards. We found quite a range of topics in such simple evaluation questionnaires or being used in discussions with participants. These included:

- preparation materials or processes, *eg* discussions with manager before event
- focus of training and whether the level of the content is appropriate
- pace and method of facilitating learning
- quality of each input, discussion and facilitation
- learning environment
- relationships within group, with facilitators/trainers/coaches *etc.*
- quality of support from managers and wider organisation
- quality of reflection built into the learning design
- process and outcomes of project components
- self-assessments of skill levels/ competencies before and after
- applicability of learning and confidence to transfer learning to job
- perceptions of overall value of the intervention.

Some asked participants overtly for their opinion of value for money in terms of whether it should be run again, whether they would recommend people to go on it *etc.*

In multi-stage interventions it is interesting to see how reaction data changes over time. Sometimes learning needs to be uncomfortable at times and so reaction data may rise and fall over a programme. Reaction data should not just be ‘happiness’ or satisfaction with the programme, but probe the learning more carefully.

### 3.2.4 Enquiring into aspects of process which are likely to be important

We often want to know about how the process of learning can be improved. To do this, we need to link evaluation with our evolving understanding of the learning process and learning theory.



Some of the factors likely to be important in many circumstances include: whether learning processes build confidence; develop or strengthen networks and relationships; give participants reflective space. In interventions where people work together in groups, the quality of group interactions is especially important.

### **3.3 Selective in-depth follow up with varied methods**

#### **3.3.1 Using a range of methods**

Given limited resources, and the difficulty of following up months after an event, one strategy used by many employers is to follow up important or complex interventions now and again. This concentrates evaluation resources where spend is high or programmes critical.

Mixed methods of evaluation often give a fuller picture. Where numbers will stand it, surveys are helpful and can set individuals free to give more honest opinions in confidence. It is now easy to do surveys on-line, and this eliminates the cost of typing in responses.

Interviews and focus groups help you dig into the 'why' (development works or does not work). Using specific examples and narrative accounts (where impact is explored as it unfolded to the individual over time) are useful methods for unpicking impact chains and reflecting back to development needs.

Where some particular skills or competencies are the focus of development, before and after 360 degree assessments can be a good approach.

When using several strands of activity in the same evaluation and/or working with several stakeholder groups it can help to have a small number of themes or questions which carry across these different evaluation activities. This helps to see patterns in the data and makes reporting very much easier. This idea also applies if the same method (for example a survey) is used before, during and after an intervention. Repeated questions or themes show change over time very much more clearly than picking different questions each time the evaluation is conducted.

#### **3.3.2 Clarifying development needs through evaluation**

Ideally evaluation should start before the intervention is designed. Although interventions are becoming more sophisticated, needs analysis is not necessarily getting the attention it deserves. In some ways standardised ideas of what managers and leaders need to learn have developed. Organisational competency frameworks may or may not reflect the things people most need to learn.

Even if learning needs are not challenged up front, they can be investigated in the evaluation. Discussion with individuals before starting a programme is also important, but often skimmed. It is essential in more complex models of management learning and also in those reliant on a PDP or learning contract or where a suitable developmental project needs to be identified.

### 3.3.3 Identifying areas for improvement

The methods above will generate information about aspects of a programme which are seen as working well in process terms and also those which need improvement. You will also have insights into whether the programme is seen as meeting development needs and which elements, in a complex intervention, are seen as most valuable.

If you have taken a stakeholder approach, you will be able to see whether the participants and other stakeholder groups have the same ideas about what is happening, or different perspectives.

## 3.4 Tracking through to the impacts of development

### 3.4.1 Looking for impact with an open mind

Experienced evaluators do make lists of the outputs and outcomes they would expect from an intervention, sometimes based on discussions with stakeholders. They then consciously ask about these in the evaluation itself and look for evidence of change in the places they would expect to see it.

#### Using questions to probe for concrete examples of impact

In interviews and discussions, the most useful questions are often of the form:

- after the learning intervention, what happened
- and later
- what did you/they do differently
- what effect did this have
- how did that affect the team/unit *etc.* or process/product/customer?

Often we can explore the impact of learning in this way, but it is an exploration not a proof or a definitive list of all the outcomes of management learning. The examples in this research often showed up outcomes which were not of the learning-skills-performance variety. For example, participants took on work they

would not have done before; or used new networks to solve organisational problems in different ways.

### **Watching out for the unexpected and changes in contextual factors**

So the textbook views of evaluation rather underplay the role of evaluator as sleuth – simply looking out for interesting impacts or peculiar patterns. Most of the case examples examined in this research had some unexpected findings. In some cases these were extremely important in explaining why development had led to certain outcomes, or not.

It is also useful to look out for other factors which may affect the impact of M&LD, such as reorganisations, changes in key players or market conditions.

### **Seeking to explore cause and effect**

Probing in this way, evaluation can be used to explore the chains of cause and effect. Simply asking open questions about the results of an activity or how a change may have been brought about can elicit a better understanding about the purposes of the development and the expected means of achieving them. Narrative methods – where individuals talk about their experiences over time – often naturally surface chains of impact.

## **3.4.2 Assessing leadership and culture change**

Some interventions expect objective outcomes *eg* achieving a qualification, making a job move, completing a career plan *etc.*

Often we want to know whether the intervention led to any visible change in leadership behaviour. Cause and effect is very hard to prove here, although the perceptions of those they work with can be useful. In examples in this study we found less use of systematic 360 feedback in evaluation, but that may be because we were not looking so much at competency based training. As interventions get more organic, before and after assessment of behaviour gets more difficult.

There has been a growth in more regular and embedded ways of assessing leadership quality *eg* regular 360 feedback, employee surveys (in which questions about quality of leadership are very common) and/or employee engagement surveys. These provide a new and useful way of looking at whether leaders, as seen by others, are changing. We did not find many strong examples of linking M&LD to changes in such metrics.

Some interventions are aimed at broader cultural change. These can be measured via responses from managers, staff and possibly also external stakeholders (customers, suppliers *etc.*). Cultural audits tools are available.

### 3.4.3 Impacts on individual and organisational performance

It is difficult to examine the ways in which learning can improve individual and organisational performance. Again, we put ourselves off by thinking that we have to find *all* the links. If we think of trying to find *examples* of performance changing, then it seems much more possible. The kind of probing described above is likely to identify at least some aspects of job performance which may have been influenced by a learning experience.

Looking for business outcomes is often much easier where projects or issues are tackled through an action learning type of intervention. Evaluating such a project in a sense looks at organisation first, by-passing link with specific knowledge or skills. One can then ask about skills in a retrospective way: 'what was it that helped you achieve that project outcome?'

## 3.5 Getting to the money: ROI or what?

The bit of existing models which causes most evaluation paralysis is the Holy Grail of Return on Investment (ROI). Literature on this is very extensive but mostly shows how one *should* approach ROI (Phillips, 2001). It is very difficult to find real examples of evaluations in the management learning field which have produced a convincing ROI analysis. Not one of those interviewed in this study felt that ROI in its pure sense is achievable for management learning – that is assessing the true cost of development and fully assessing its bottom line impact – so let's put that to one side and see what is doable.

Some of the companies in this study rather cheekily simply asked participants/stakeholders for their views on ROI. This may not give especially valid information, but asking people whether they would spend the money again is quite a sensible thing to ask.

### 3.5.1 Looking at financial measures where you can: notional cost-benefit

Costing what you can cost is a good discipline – actual spend, individual time (participants and trainers/facilitators), support from others, opportunity cost of time off the job *etc.*

One of the advantages of the 'notional cost-benefit' approach, which links to the idea of visualising processes and outcomes, and facilitating dialogue on this, is that it gives a rough idea of what matters and what to pay attention to in terms of possible benefits .

If positive impacts can be illustrated, as described above, then they can often have a rough monetary value put on them. In a number of cases we examined, the positive financial benefits of projects undertaken vastly outweighed the cost of the development programme they were part of.

Table 3.1 shows some examples of impacts which can be realistically assigned a financial value.

**Table 3.1: Example indicators of financial returns**

Objectives	Has it worked?	Assigned values
To build leadership capability for change	Reduce number of change consultants & managers leading change projects	Day rate paid to consultants
	Increased confidence for change	Savings/value of successful change
To improve people management skills	Effective performance management	Productivity per head of direct reports/teams
	Reduce absence	Value of days lost through absence
	Improved 360 feedback	Employee retention
	Improved org survey feedback	
Build home grown talent pipeline	High performing team	Team productivity
	Ratio internal promotions to external hires	Saved cost per hire
Build internal capability	Improved retention rate	
	Delivery of project work undertaken during programme	Value of project & assignment deliverables & cost savings in business improvement
Build organisational brand for leadership	Assignments taken on post-programme	
	Easier to attract talent	Less spend on head hunting/ talent attraction
	Virtuous circle of recruitment	

*Source: IES, 2011*

So ROI thinking is certainly important but needs re-positioning within practice. We should:

- cost where we can
- identify obvious areas where business impact would be expected and look for them
- be prepared to find other impacts and then price them where you can
- identify minimum benefit figures if not complete ones.

### 3.5.2 Social returns on investment in development

Social return on investment (SROI) is an approach to measurement, developed from cost-benefit analysis, social accounting and social auditing, which captures *social* value by translating social objectives into financial and non-financial measures (New Economics Foundation, 2008). SROI measures the value of the benefits relative to the costs of achieving those benefits. It encourages a stakeholder view of social and environmental impact in which financial return is important, but not an exclusive indicator of value. Raising the standards of management or encouraging diversity may have value in terms of social change as well as economic value.

Having identified with stakeholders what social value means to them, then looking for whether it has taken place follows the same logic as looking for other outcomes of development. Sometimes financial proxies can be found for social returns.

## 3.6 Evaluation as learning

More recent approaches to the evaluation of M&LD tend to ask somewhat deeper questions than those of the simple 'proving' and 'improving' variety. What these perspectives have in common is that they see evaluation as a far more integrated part of learning. This is both about viewing evaluation as a learning activity for those involved in the development, and learning from evaluation to influence current or future development interventions.

### 3.6.1 Starting before development begins

Evaluation is likely to be stronger if it starts before the development takes place. This makes it possible to look at managers and leaders before their development is experienced. Practical examples include using self-assessment or 360 degree tools to get a fix on behaviours or competencies. Employee surveys can also look at the state of leadership in a whole organisation programme or major change initiative is being planned.

Early discussion also allows a more questioning and refined understanding of learning needs. In some organisations, discussions between participants and their own managers can create a firmer understanding before development takes place.

Some programmes begin with development centres. These can help to set a baseline understanding of managers' skills, clarify both individual and group learning needs and help individuals frame a PDP. Coaching can start in a similar way, with the individual and the coach often agreeing some goals, although these often change over a period of coaching.

### 3.6.2 Using reflection as evaluation and vice versa

Where there are times for reflection during development activity, these can form part the evaluation approach. It is quite common for groups at an event to reflect on what happened in a previous activity or on the day before, and discuss expectations for up-coming activities or their hopes for the day ahead. If such discussions are captured in a reasonably consistent way, they are a very helpful input to evaluation, especially as they can show how thoughts and perceptions of learning change over the period of an intervention.

But this works the other way round too. If evaluation discussions take place during an intervention, as well as at the end, they become opportunities for participants to reflect on their learning and to make better use of what is to follow.

So the reflection part of the learning cycle and evaluation can, in effect, become one and the same thing for the participants.

Other approaches which can strengthen this integration of evaluation into learning include:

- Regular discussions between a participant and their manager (or mentor) throughout longer interventions and beyond.
- Using learning logs or diaries to support reflection.

### 3.6.3 Cycles of evaluation and co-created learning

A more integrated approach can also influence the design of learning.

#### **Re-framing the purposes of development and learning needs addressed**

We have already examined the potential for evaluation to clarify, or even re-frame, learning needs. This can become a deeper activity, asking about the real purpose of the intervention and whether it is an appropriate one. Here we move into the bottom right box of the purposes framework (Table 2.1).

#### **Cycles of evaluation influencing design**

In interventions with multiple activities/stages, findings from evaluation at one stage can directly influence later stages of the development activity. This can be through refined understanding of development needs and/or better understanding of what learning approaches work best for the target group.

Some of the examples also showed how relatively open-ended evaluation discussions when an event was piloted could be used to develop a more structured evaluation tool to be used on subsequent occasions.

### **Participants as co-creators of learning**

In most approaches, participants in development become involved in learning design through their involvement in evaluation. For example, those asked for feedback at the end of an event may realistically expect this feedback to influence the event if it is run again. However we can take the idea of participants shaping development a good deal further. On longer or more modular programmes, participants, collectively as well as individually, can take on a much more explicit role in design as the programme proceeds. They can set agendas for future components of a programme and also influence the mix of different types of activity.



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## 4 Conclusions and Practical Tips

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### 4.1 Clearer frameworks make for more confident evaluation

The most experienced evaluators in this study put much more effort into the design of their evaluations at the front end and used strong mental models of how to structure evaluation to keep it on track.

Some parameters to bear in mind throughout an evaluation are:

- The purposes of the evaluation and the stakeholders in it.
- Attending to the process and content of each stage or element of a M&LD intervention.
- The range of impacts which will be looked for, including social and attitudinal impacts as well as 'reaction' to the experience, skill and behaviour change and possible impacts on performance.
- The approach which will be taken, if any, to identifying financial inputs and impacts and how this data will be obtained.
- Differing levels at which impact may be seen – individual, team, unit and organisational.

### 4.2 A journey towards more strategic evaluation

We can see evaluation as a journey of developing practice, but not a simple one from evaluating experience to evaluating organisational impact or ROI. It is rather a journey which acknowledges the rather unpredictable and personal nature of management learning and seeks to build evaluation more into the process of designing development rather than pinning it on afterwards.

Some of the steps on that journey can include:

1. Using largely informal evaluation, but taking more notice of it.
2. Adopting more systematic approaches, initially to very simple data collection and later to more varied methods and more in-depth enquiries.
3. Building evaluation into the design of learning. This step opens the door to measuring factors of interest *before* the programmed or intervention starts as well as afterwards, which is the key to showing organisational impact.

The journey does not end here.

4. The rapidly developing ideas of evidence-based practice suggest a further step which we might call 'evaluation-led design'. This involves reviewing a wider range of previous evaluations of similar interventions or the learning of similar participant populations. This evidence is likely to come from outside the organisation. Such 'meta evaluation' can tackle deeper issues about the effectiveness of M&LD approaches in varied contexts and help us use more effective methods (Pawson, 2002). Here we still have a very long way to go!

### 4.3 Hints and tips

Looking overall at the examples collected, some practical hints and tips – maybe principles of evaluation – emerge:

1. Horses for courses – design your evaluation to fit its **purposes and key audiences** as well as the nature of the intervention itself.
2. Be businesslike in setting objectives, budget and work plan for any evaluation so that you **use your evaluation resources effectively**.
3. Adopt a **cheerful spirit of enquiry** rather than the leaden heart which comes from seeing evaluation as a difficult chore.
4. Worry less about comprehensive ROI and look for **impact**. Identify where you might expect that impact to be visible. Try a notional cost-benefit analysis rather than a complete one.
5. **Enhance your simplest evaluation data sources**, such as your usual 'happy sheets', to make them more informative. Ask less about the sandwiches and more about the learning and how it could be improved.
6. Develop your **repertoire of approaches** to suit the different kinds of M&LD activity you are evaluating. Combine **hard (fact) and soft (opinion) data**, quantitative and qualitative techniques.

7. **Dig deeper** in at least some conversations, even if only with small numbers of individuals. This will help you improve your understanding of business impact and the nature of cause and effect in management learning.
8. **Integrate evaluation into learning design**, before, during and after interventions. Use participants as co-evaluators and use evaluation to help them strengthen the reflection part of their learning.
9. **Use the data you collect**. It is better to collect less and use it well, than to carry out complex evaluations and do nothing with the results.

We have stopped at nine, so the tenth is your own!

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