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Management development experiences and expectations: informal versus formal learning
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Management development experiences and expectations: informal versus formal learning

ABSTRACT:

Purpose: Many organisations are reconsidering their investment in formal education and training, in favour of more informal approaches to learning such as mentoring, temporary assignments, stretch assignments, and job rotation. The purpose of this research was to explore the ways in which managers have developed capabilities for their roles thus far and their preferred approaches for future development with particular consideration given to a comparison of formal and informal learning.

Design/methodology/approach: This paper reports on a case study conducted within an Australian nonprofit organisation focusing on the extent to which managers attribute their current level of management skills to formal or informal learning and the extent to which they would prefer formal or informal learning (or a combination) for future development.

Findings: Findings indicate a large part of the managers' current management capabilities were acquired through informal means, and these are seen as desirable for ongoing development, however there is also a desire for formal learning methods to complement informal methods.

Originality/value: Management development is a critical HRD activity however there is limited knowledge about how managers have built their current capabilities and their preferences in terms of the mix of formal and informal learning for the future.

Classification: Research paper

Keywords: Informal learning; Formal learning; Leadership development; Management development; Management training; Experiential learning

Management development experiences and expectations: informal versus formal learning

In a rapidly-changing environment it is essential that organisations identify effective ways to develop and enhance management skills and capabilities (Armstrong and Sadler-Smith, 2008), with management development programs well-established as a common approach to addressing these needs (Cunningham, 2012). Keeping management capabilities relevant and aligned with organisational strategies and objectives is critical not only for the individuals involved, but also for the potential impact on the effectiveness of their employees.

Given the importance of management development, there is a need to consider strategically appropriate approaches to the design of learning interventions for this audience. Traditional adult learning literature emphasises that mature learners prefer self-direction and active learning that draws on their own experiences, they also need to see the value of learning and possess a readiness to learn (Knowles, 1980). These principles have been used to argue for more effective education and training, as well as being applied to on-the-job training. It seems however that many organisations are reconsidering their investment in broader formal education, in favour of more informal approaches to learning such as mentoring, temporary assignments, stretch assignments, and job rotation (Cunningham and Hillier, 2013). What is missing in the current literature is an understanding of whether this shift in focus is sought by the managers themselves. There are also questions relating to what managers as learners are looking for in their development, and their perceptions of informal approaches versus formal ways of learning. Therefore, this paper explores specifically the ways in which managers have developed capabilities for their roles thus far, and their preferred approaches for future development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to build an effective development approach for managers, it is important to consider the vast array of development methods available, and how these can be used effectively to develop management capabilities. This review first considers the broader literature on informal and formal learning and reflects on the growing call to utilise these two forms of learning in a complementary way. Then the extant literature on management development is addressed, particularly considering how formal and informal learning are applied to management development.

Formal and Informal Learning

Providing development opportunities that are effective for both the individual and the organisation has long been of interest to academics and practitioners. Often when considering the most appropriate approaches, the distinction is made between formal modes of training and education, and less formal, more experiential development approaches. Formal learning is typically considered to involve learning that is "organised and structured with learning objectives and involving off-the-job classroom or online course work, workshops and seminars, or cooperative and internship experiences" (Cunningham and Hillier, 2013, p. 38). Conversely, informal learning is a term typically used to describe learning that occurs outside the confines of a structured learning environment (Cunningham and Hillier, 2013), suggesting that any learning that is not formal learning is informal.

Historically, definitions of informal learning tend to describe what this form of learning is missing, for example defining informal learning as "planned learning which occurs in a setting or situation without a formal workshop, lesson plan, instructor or examination" (Bell, 1977, p. 280). However, there is limited value in distinguishing this type of learning by what it "is not" and it runs the risk of implying that informal learning is a less effective form of learning than more formal means (Billett, 2002). On the contrary, informal

learning has been argued to have beneficial outcomes such as practical and applied knowledge specifically for the individual learner, enhanced intra- and interpersonal skills and cultural awareness, and learning that can be immediately applied to situations specific to the learner (Billett, 2002). It can be argued that such learning is critical for organisations as the pace of change continues and there is a need for organisations (and the individuals within them) to be able to adapt quickly to changing demands (Russ-Eft, Watkins, Marsick, Jacobs, and McLean, 2014). Therefore, we argue that it is important that informal learning not be left to chance but should be adopted as a deliberate strategy in conjunction with more formal modes of learning in order to gain the most benefit from these learning approaches. In particular, there is an argument that seeing informal and formal learning as being polar opposites, denies the possibility that their combination may in fact be the best way to structure learning, and indeed there is a continuing move to make formal learning less formal and informal learning more formal and integrate them in a way that balances the benefits of each mode (Malcolm, Hodkinson, and Colley, 2003).

In line with the view of formal and informal learning as complementary, the Center for Creative Leadership (2016b) has promulgated the 70-20-10 model, claiming that the model is "a research-based, time-tested guideline for developing managers …[suggesting] you need to have three types of experience, using a 70-20-10 ratio: challenging assignments (70 percent), developmental relationships (20 percent) and coursework and training (10 percent)" (Center for Creative Leadership, 2016a). However, the research upon which this model draws has not been made explicit and there has been some discussion as to the empirical basis of the model. Indeed McCall (2010, p. 4) claims of the 70-20-10 model, "I have not found an original published source, though the percentages clearly come from data reported in McCall et al. (1988) and Lindsey, Homes and McCall (1987)". Regardless of the origins (and subsequent debate over the specific ratio), the model seems to have appeal to a

wider audience with the message and recognition that in addition to formal learning,

experiential learning and social learning play a significant role in development of capabilities.

Management Development

Management development typically refers to a system of organisational activities and

approaches aimed at developing management capabilities for the ultimate benefit of the

organisation (Cullen and Turnbull, 2005). Whilst the focus of this research was specifically

on the development of managers, we acknowledge that often the two terms leadership and

management are used interchangeably. The focus of our paper is on developing those who

hold formal roles as managers in an organisation however, people in these roles are also seen

as leaders and therefore the leadership development literature has been considered. Indeed,

in a model of management competencies offered by Viitala (2005), leadership was only one

of six competencies for managers, with the others including technical competencies, business

competencies, knowledge management competencies, social competencies and intrapersonal

competencies. Interestingly, whilst leadership and management attributes have been studied

extensively over a long period of time, much less research has focused on how to effectively

and efficiently develop these attributes and this is argued to be a critical consideration still

requiring empirical research (Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, and McKee, 2014).

Management development via formal means is widely accepted; either via the use of

formal education or by the use of management training and development programs sponsored

by the organisation. However, there has also been an acknowledgement of the importance of

a holistic approach to management development that goes beyond formal training and

embraces other ways of learning through experience and engagement on the job and with

other people. Whilst there has been significant focus on the appropriate design of formal

leadership development approaches, it has been argued that the day-to-day lives of leaders is

where they practice leadership and this practice is "where the crux of development really

resides" (Day et al., 2014, p. 80), suggesting that this experiential learning is playing a significant role in shaping the capabilities of managers.

Even formal management education is advocating a move to more immediate and applied learning opportunities. This move is driven at least in part to match corporate training programs that emphasise learning that is "distributed at the time of need, embedded in a work context, and delivered in rapid "bite-sized pieces" which aim to meet participants' needs in terms of depth of information coverage, timeliness of delivery, and job relatedness" (Armstrong and Sadler-Smith, 2008, p. 571). This shift to less formal modes of learning is also related to the growing recognition that "people start at different places in their developmental journeys as leaders and develop at different rates and in different ways over time" (Day et al., 2014, p. 79).

Informal learning for the purposes of management development has received some attention in research and practice. For example, Cunningham and Hillier (2013) studied informal learning to identify the activities and the processes through which managers develop proficiency. They argue that it is critical that informal learning is promoted in the workplace, and that in particular, the ability to reflect on experience needs to be developed in managers to capitalise on these learning opportunities. This reflection may be key; as McCall (2004, p.128) cautions that experience alone is not sufficient for learning and that "people don't automatically learn from experience. They can come away with nothing, the wrong lessons, or only some of what they might have learned".

Extant literature on reflective processes and learning argues the importance in the design stages of interventions to provide chances to reflect upon activities to ensure the completion of the full cycle of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 2000) and to build skills in self-reflection and personal evaluation (Cunningham, 2012). Without these opportunities the organisation runs the risk of providing a range of activities that are not

effective for learning and do not meet the overall objective of facilitating the transfer of learning (Perkins and Salomon, 1992). Therefore, we argue that although informal learning can be a powerful means of management development, it requires explicit attention in the design stages to ensure the full benefit and learning opportunities are realised.

There has been some recent consideration given to the role of informal learning in developing leaders, referred to by Hezlett (2016) as "experience-driven leadership development", and by Woodall (2000) as "work-based management development". The current research, focusing on the role of formal and informal learning in management development, adopted the model byWoodall and Winstanley (1998) separating informal learning into three categories; learning from others, learning from tasks and learning with others. Learning from others includes activities such as coaching, mentoring and being able to observe role models in action. Learning from tasks involves learners engaging in special projects, having opportunities for job rotation or undertaking secondments or other such activities. Finally, learning with others can involve experiences such as networking, or working on task forces or working groups.

Although forms of formal and informal learning have been subject to extensive research, what is far less explored is how managers as learners perceive these methods, and whether they consider particular approaches more salient to them given their particular learning needs and work demands. In an extensive international study of leadership development, Gentry, Eckert, Munusamy, Stawiski, and Martin (2014) found that managers in different national contexts face different challenges and therefore have differing priorities for content of leadership development. The current research embraces this notion that context may have implications for management development and was therefore designed to explore managers' interpretations of their own development journeys to date and preferences

for the future in the context of a nonprofit organisation. In particular, the research sought to identify:

- The extent to which managers attribute their current level of management skills to formal or informal learning
- The extent to which managers would prefer formal or informal learning (or a combination) for future development

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

As the aim of the research was to understand the experiences of individuals in relation to the development of their capabilities as a manager both past and future, a qualitative approach was determined most appropriate to better understand these experiences. Qualitative research allows for differing views on the topic of interest and is situational to allow for context (Stake, 2010). A case study organisation was chosen to provide an opportunity to access a range of managers in one particular organisational context.

Research context: case organisation and participants

This research was subject to ethical clearance and agreement was given to maintain the anonymity of the organisation and those being interviewed therefore it cannot be named. The case organisation is an Australian non-profit entity conducting research into a specific disease and providing support for those impacted by this disease in the community. The non-profit sector has experienced significant change over the past couple of decades, with calls to improve governance and management to keep pace with the public and private sectors (McClusky, 2002) and to become more "business-like" (Dart, 2004). Nonprofit organisations have encountered increasing levels of scrutiny and calls have been made to focus on organisational efficiencies and performance more aligned with business practices in other sectors (Ridder, Piening, and Baluch, 2012). It has also been argued that whilst leaders in nonprofits may be strong and passionate about their cause, they may lack management

capabilities and indeed Stid and Bradach (2009, p. 35) conclude that nonprofits are often "strongly led, but under-managed". Many nonprofit organisations also rely heavily on a volunteer workforce to deliver their product or service, and even the paid employees have been argued to have differing needs and expectations to other sectors (Schepers et al., 2005). All of these factors combine to present challenges for managers in nonprofit organisations and highlight the need for ongoing capability development. As a result of significant organisational growth and increasing demands on their managers with such growth, the Senior Executive team in the case organisation were reviewing their overall approach to management development and this research provided a basis for that review.

The case organisation has approximately 250 paid employees, and a regular volunteer workforce of approximately 2000. The organisational structure includes three levels of management; Senior Executive (CEO and Heads of Department), Executive Managers and Team Leaders. The Senior Executive team is responsible for the overall strategic direction of the organisation. Executive Managers report to the Senior Executive and are responsible for particular functions of the organisation. Finally, Team Leaders, reporting to Executive Managers are frontline managers with responsibility for a specific group of individuals working within a function.

Participants included managers from different levels and functional areas, with a total of 21 individuals interviewed: 6 from the Senior Executive (100% of managers at this level), 4 Executive Managers (29% of those at this level) and 11 Team Leaders (37% of those at this level). Participants' tenure in the organisation ranged from 6 months to 24 years, with time in their current role ranging from 2 weeks to 11 years. The large majority of participants had not undertaken any formal management education or training; three reported attending some short courses in the past related to management, and five held formal qualifications (only two of which were in business/management related fields, with the others in health/science).

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from each participant individually. Interviews such as these allow for exploration of topics of interest without too heavily directing or influencing the responses from participants (Creswell, 2003). The interview questions covered a variety of issues relating to the participants' roles as managers within the organisation. The findings reported in this paper relate to a group of questions focused specifically on management development:

- How have you gained your current knowledge, skills and abilities to be a manager?

- Have you done any formal courses or training in management? (if so, details and what you learnt from it)

- What management development opportunities have you undertaken at [case organisation]?

- What development opportunities would you like to undertake in the future?

These questions were designed to be as broad as possible and included additional prompts where necessary, asking for evaluation of the effectiveness and the outcomes of what they have experienced. Interviews lasted between 40 minutes and 70 minutes and were transcribed verbatim for further analysis.

Data Analysis

Theoretical thematic analysis was used to analyse the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006), and to increase objectivity of the analysis, an experienced researcher not involved in the interviews undertook coding. The two researchers involved in the data collection conducted coding on interview samples to ensure agreement on the coding approach.

In order to conduct the analysis, the data were first separated according to the two key foci (previous management development and future management development) and were analysed separately. Two cycles of coding were then undertaken (Saldana, 2009). The first

cycle used open coding (Charmaz, 2006), identifying themes emerging from the data. The

second cycle involved reassembling the data using axial coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998)

whereby the themes emerging from the first cycle were grouped under categories of learning

aligned with the literature; informal learning in the forms of learning from work, learning

from others, or learning with others (Woodall and Winstanley, 1998) and formal learning (i.e.

training and education). The results are presented according to these four main themes.

FINDINGS

Findings are presented in two sections; previous management development

experiences, and preferences for management development in the future.

Past Management Development

Table 1 summarises the themes and sub-themes from the analysis relating to past

management development.

Insert Table 1 about here

Learning from work

The most common response to how existing management skills were developed by

participants was through their daily work, and the participants overwhelmingly reported

learning via trial and error:

I think through probably experience; you know, doing the wrong thing or not doing

quite the right thing... We all learn by trial and error; it's unavoidable. (21MTL)

Participants acknowledged that often their learning was a result of taking action that

wasn't effective or had an unexpected outcome. Importantly they noted that in these

instances, they often reflected on the reasons for these outcomes and planned to do something

different in future; very much the essential elements of experiential or action learning (Kolb, 1984):

And I think it's through that self-reflection and forcing yourself to sit and go, "Okay, so what did I do well or not well then? And I will try that again." (09EM)

In addition to trial and error and learning through their daily work, some also recognised that promotion or a change of roles had developed their current management skills. As one explained:

[I was told] This person is ready to go into your position if you want to move around and create another position…So he gave me the opportunity to create a new role for myself. (14MTL)

Participants acknowledged that undertaking different roles (either internally or externally) gave them the opportunity to develop and apply different management skills or to experience different situations. For example:

… moving from strictly a [functional] role and what that involved into a much broader business role has been probably my biggest … areas of change and development… (15HD)

In particular, one manager believed that experience gained by leaving the organisation and returning some years later was also responsible for development:

Yeah, it's interesting. Probably somewhat an answer that you wouldn't expect; but actually going out and in again [of the organisation] has probably helped as well. Having the experience outside of the organisation… (19HD)

Learning from others

After learning from their work, the next most common form of management development experienced by participants was learning from others, particularly when these

individuals have more knowledge and experience. Having a mentor or role model, even if only informally, was seen as a powerful way to use those with more experience as a source of knowledge:

[my manager] didn't have heaps of time to spend with us but she always made sure the time she spent with us, she would give us advice and say, "Hey, here are some things that you can read to learn more about." Always there to talk about things and share thoughts. That's been good. (02MTL)

Beyond mentoring or coaching, the participants also reported the power of observing others in a management situation and reflecting on how and why they took certain actions and then evaluating the outcomes:

I think I have learnt most by observing the people in management and thinking, "Mmm, yes, that probably won't work so well. But, wow, that works really well. How do they do that?"----- (10MTL)

Beyond direct line managers or peers in management roles, there was also recognition of the role of "experts" in the organisation; in the most part, Human Resource (HR) professionals. A common reflection was that advice from those in HR roles assisted managers to learn about how to handle management situations in an appropriate way, particularly issues of performance management:

Usually that leads to us going, "We don't know really how to approach it [performance management]," so we talk to HR and we talk about it on that level. (03MTL)

Learning with others

In addition to learning from other more experienced individuals, there was a belief that learning had occurred in a collegial way – learning alongside others in similar roles or

situations. In particular, there was discussion of the value of having informal sessions providing the opportunity to share information and gain feedback from others:

so what I do do, every second team meeting which ends up being once a month, we tack on an hour and we do a "lunch and learn" [to share information]. (19HD)

Discussion of management issues with peers focusing on how to handle particular situations was also seen as a beneficial way to build management skills.

or I will go and ask a peer, "I just did that. Was that wrong?" "Yes, that was wrong." "Oh, okay, right, I will try that again". (09EM)

Formal learning

Beyond the informal means previously discussed, the participants also identified some of the formal learning they had used to develop their management skills. There was limited evidence of internal training courses, however many pointed to the annual staff conference and the learning to be gained from this event:

we had a staff conference earlier this year, and I think [the organisation] tries to provide people with the opportunity to build skills (21MTL)

External learning opportunities were also noted; either in the form of short courses or tertiary education.

I went to the US and I sat in this workshop, with all these different workshops - I have been over a number of times. (06HD)

I have done some courses of my own, you know, those one-day or two-day exec management course. (09EM)

While participants reported an appreciation of the opportunity to participate in these external activities, some commented that these activities provided access to general

information but were of limited value, as they were not tailored in any way to their organisation or their specific situation.

It was evident that a large majority of the knowledge gained by participants was attributed to informal learning methods. This was reported by participants to be a common situation in the nonprofit sector where it is perceived there are less discretionary funds to spend on "non-core" activities, and management development is seen in this light. A result of the organisation undergoing significant and rapid growth, with a policy of promotion from within wherever possible meant that there were many managers with limited experience in a management role. It was therefore inevitable that those being appointed to management roles would not have had extensive formal training but relied on experiential and social learning to grow and adapt in their roles.

Future Management Development

Table 2 summarises the themes and sub-themes relating to the preferences for management development approaches that emerged from the data analysis.

Insert Table 2 about here

Formal learning

Although formal learning did not emerge as a prevalent theme in the analysis of how management skills had been acquired in the past, there certainly was a strong desire for formal learning, both internal and external, for future development.

It would be nice to go to formal courses and get a benchmark for what the best practice is around managing certain situations and certain things. (13MTL)

*I think the managers need to - I think they all need some light level of training,
whether it be a one/two-dayer, online or whatever course for "how to be a manager".
(14MTL)*

It might be the case that the participants have not been involved in significant formal
development previously and therefore see it as the "panacea" for assisting them to develop
the skills they need. However, even though this desire for formal learning was strong, it was
also evident that participants were not necessarily seeking lengthy education processes, but
rather targeted development opportunities to suit their needs, and in some cases a brief
introduction to the formal elements of management. They were also very specific about the
content of the formal learning they sought, with topics such as performance management
techniques and processes, project management and knowledge of organisational policies and
procedures the most commonly identified.

Learning from others

There was also widespread interest in learning from others with more experience and
management skills. Informal mentoring and coaching emerged as prevalent in previous
management development and was also identified as appropriate for future development
however there was also a desire for more formal allocation of mentors with whom they could
discuss challenging management situations. It was also identified that the desire for this
coaching and mentoring raised issues of adequately training managers to be skilled in
mentoring others.

*My view is that those programs that you do over a couple of days are not terribly
helpful. I do think it needs to be tailored to the individual but that requires someone then to
be the mentor of that individual. So the mentor needs to be trained properly as well. That
would be ideal, to have a mentoring program. (11HD)*

It would be awesome if there was actually a formal mentorship program in the organisation, but that to my knowledge doesn't exist as yet… (13MTL)

Whilst some had encountered informal coaching and/or mentoring, none of them had participated in formal programs of this type. In expressing a desire for coaching and mentoring, the participants sought to develop capabilities particularly around managing difficult situations within their teams, how to have performance conversations and other situations where they felt the need to improve interpersonal relationships in the workplace. Whilst willingness to participate is important for the success of such programs, the organisation also requires a level of maturity in the organisation in terms of processes and procedures to support effective coaching (Mihiotis and Argirou, 2016), and this would require consideration of appropriate support in design of the program.

Learning from work

Although learning through formal means and from others were the most preferred approaches for future development, there was still recognition that a great deal could be learnt through daily work and activities. Many acknowledged that their development of management skills will ultimately rely on them undertaking their role, reflecting and making adjustments:

Yes, I think that's most effective [learning on the job]. Plus, from a very practical point of view, people are very time-poor and taking days out, half days out all over the place to attend courses; not necessarily going to be practical either. (21MTL)

However, the participants also sought more structured opportunities than simply day-to-day work. In particular, there was a desire to be given new roles or opportunities to work on projects beyond their normal position in order to gain a greater depth and breadth of exposure to work in the organisation:

I would like to see an overlap of opportunities, with more cross-department opportunities; and working together easier… So for managers, I think there can be different projects or things that we want to do, that can bring managers together to work on important areas/projects or cross-departments, and that will provide some good development opportunities. (15HD)

Collectively, participants perceived that these learning opportunities would give them a broader and more holistic view of the organisation, a personal understanding of other departments and areas that would enhance their ability to act in their own roles, and a chance to work with different people.

Learning with others

Finally, there was also recognition of the opportunities presented by sharing information and learning with other managers. The desire to be able to share both positive and negative examples in a safe environment for mutual support and learning with peers was seen as valuable. However, there is not currently a culture of willingness to disclose such errors and negative experiences. There was however a genuine desire to have a means of sharing information with peers in similar situations.

I hope that they get to a point with the management development, that there's a level of trust within managers; … that there would be a natural formation of this kind of support groups, where they would have these informal chats where they can just be able to help each other grow for the benefit of the organisation. (09EM)

Similar to learning from others, the managers saw peer learning as a way to share experiences particularly around handling interpersonal situations, conflicts and other challenges within the team, as well as developing a broader understanding of how departments fit together and some of the political dimensions of the organisation.

Overall, when considering future development, managers acknowledged that some elements of their role may be context-specific; particularly those aspects involving managing a large volunteer workforce. Many were cognisant that they were managing in a strongly mission-driven and values focused organisation. In this context they perceived a need to manage not only the organisational imperatives but to behave in a way that is consistent with stakeholders (internal and external) and community expectations.

In summary, managers were seeking a range of management development opportunities in the future. They did see the value of formal education and training and expressed a desire to engage with this learning as long as it was applicable to their situation and role. However, they also recognised the value of informal learning opportunities; albeit with a more structured design than they have experienced in the past.

DISCUSSION

Development of managers is a complex undertaking as individuals move from novice to expert at differing rates, and leadership capability is considered a combination of task, social and emotional skills as well as deeper domains such as identity, the ability to self-monitor and an awareness of their own values (Lord and Hall, 2005). Clearly, this mix requires far more complex methods of development than are often included in traditional management development programs. This study sought to identify the extent to which managers attribute their current level of management skills to formal or informal learning and the extent to which managers would prefer formal or informal learning (or a mix of both) for future development. The results reveal several key contributions to relevant theory.

First, the results demonstrated that although managers attribute a large part of their current management capabilities to learning through informal means, and see this as a valuable method for acquiring some of the capabilities in the future. Of particular note however, managers did not dismiss formal modes of education and training, but instead

expressed a desire for more formal learning. It is clear that managers can differentiate (even if unconsciously) the types of knowledge sought and can see the value of formal learning for situations where the nature of the knowledge is *factual* (ie. declarative knowledge (Debowski, 2006)) or relates to specific *processes* or ways to approach tasks (ie. procedural knowledge (Debowski, 2006)). This is knowledge that Nonaka (1991) would categorise as explicit; easily identified, documented and shared, through a process referred to as combination (ie combining explicit knowledge with other explicit knowledge). Whilst there has been a move to embrace informal learning and organisations are moving to more just-in-time development, the evidence shows that participants still saw value in having access to such explicit knowledge presented in more traditional forms.

Second, our findings present empirical evidence to support the suggestion of Manuti, Pastore, Scardigno, Giancaspro, and Morciano (2015) that formal and informal learning should exist in parallel rather than being seen as two separate entities. We know from a learning design perspective that formal learning can improve a learner's ability to learn from informal methods and assists with integration of these learnings with those obtained through more formal means (Choi and Jacobs, 2011; Svensson, Ellström, and Åberg, 2004) however our findings provide evidence that managers as learners perceive formal learning to be of benefit when coupled with informal modes of learning. Therefore, an approach to management development that places a focus on the learning processes and the strategic development of the combination of formal and informal methods adopted will enhance overall outcomes for managers.

Third, managers overwhelmingly reported their preference to engage in social learning – learning from and with others. They saw these situations as providing an opportunity to share and build on tacit knowledge; in effect reflecting the socialisation and externalisation processes of knowledge creation identified by Nonaka (1994). Socialisation

involves converting tacit knowledge to tacit knowledge – usually without articulation, often through observation of others. Whilst it might be useful for managers to undertake such socialisation, there are limitations to this process if knowledge is not clearly articulated and the quality of the learning is not guaranteed. However, externalisation (converting tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge) in the context of social learning does offer opportunities for managers to articulate their experience and knowledge for the benefit of other managers. This reinforces the importance of organisations finding ways to facilitate this externalisation process in a more systematic and sustainable manner.

Fourth, our results demonstrate that managers do indeed attribute a large part of their current capabilities to experiential learning. Much of the past learning experienced by the managers was based on "learning by doing" or "trial and error"; in essence, experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). Furthermore, whilst some acknowledged that learning from such episodes involved their reflection on the experience, these results highlight the importance of providing managers with the skills necessary for learning from these experiential processes, as we know that critical reflection is a key component of such learning (Mezirow, 1990, 2000). As such, the suggestion that we must become "intentional" about informal learning (Marsick, Volpe, and Watkins, 1999) has been articulated by the study participants. Kennedy, Carroll, and Francoeur (2013, p. 10) argued in a conceptual paper that because theory and research is moving towards a recognition that leadership is "emergent, relational and collective", leadership development should move away from a skills building focus, to a focus on developing mindsets and underlying assumptions. Our research provides much needed empirical evidence to support this argument by demonstrating that managers recognise they will gain most from development that focuses on the emergent issues of managing and provides support via experiential and social means to develop their ability to manage in a changing environment. In summary, this study provides evidence for the claim

of the 70:20:10 model (Center for Creative Leadership, 2016a); that a substantial part of learning occurs through experience and that formal education and training is but a small part of our capability development.

Finally, our findings demonstrate that contextual factors must be accounted for in the design of management development. In this study managers expressed specific challenges in their work environment that they believe are unique to being a manager in the nonprofit sector. Although we did not explicitly compare development needs and expectations of these managers with those in other sectors, our results indicate that managers are aware of differences that are context-specific. Whilst the study by Gentry et al. (2014) demonstrated leadership development needs differed based on country, this research has considered the sector as context and raises the question of whether sectoral differences might also drive differences in management development needs that to date have not been explored. This question could be the focus for future research.

Implications for Practice

For those organisations intending to develop comprehensive management development programs, these results highlight some important considerations. Using informal learning cannot simply be left to chance and at an organisational level - it requires support and infrastructure, coupled with processes that facilitate the opportunities for this learning to take place. As noted by Cunningham and Hillier (2013), informal learning requires planning processes, active learning and modelling, strong relationships and structure that encourages application-oriented learning. Experiential learning requires a reflective process so that the insights from the experience can be incorporated into future actions, and it has been argued that this requires first to legitimise learning through experience and second to develop an environment that supports such learning (Akuratiyagamage, 2006).

Our findings point to the importance of developing an infrastructure around learning and development that allows for individuals to first identify and then access the most appropriate type of activity for their learning needs. This may include use of performance management processes to identify development needs, through to ensuring that a range of options for development both formal and informal are made explicit to the managers seeking development. The results also emphasise that if reflection and self-evaluation are to be part of a learning program then these need to be explicitly developed as a part of the program, rather than being left to chance. The results of this study reinforce that beyond formal training or education opportunities, there is a demand for the coordination and integration of informal approaches with this formal learning.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, we argue that informal learning should not be seen as a lesser form of learning; it provides an opportunity for development of management skills to complement the development gained from more formal modes. Informal learning is by its very nature tailored to the individual. It is accessed at a point in an individual's development that is timely and the learnings are able to be immediately applied. Therefore, we argue for the effective combination of informal learning with formal learning methods; although informal learning may be less structured, it must nonetheless be strategically managed by organisations as it offers a powerful way to tailor learning opportunities for individual managers to complement formal education and training offerings.

The organisation did not play a role in the collection or analysis of data nor reporting of the

findings from the study.

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Table 1: Past management development

Theme	Sub-themes
Learning from work	Trial and error
	Promotion or changing roles
	External experience
Learning from others	Observation
	Mentor & role model
	Expert advice
Learning with others	Information sharing sessions
	Feedback & peers
Formal learning	Internal training
	External training and education

Table 2: Future management development

Theme	Sub-themes
Learning from work	On the job
	Promotion or changing roles
Learning from others	Informal mentor & role model
	Mentor and coaching program
Learning with others	Information sharing
Formal learning	Internal training
	External training and education