QLP Article for ASSIGnation (forthcoming)

Title: The Quality Leaders Project: management development through service development.

By

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The Quality Leaders Project (QLP) is a new approach to management development which adopts a service development vehicle for work-based learning. The approach was designed specifically in the context of the development of libraries staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and is currently being developed in the context of the development of services to young people through the QLP-Youth strand, which will be holding its inaugural staff development session in January 2004. The programme is structured around a service development proposal and consists of a development programme delivered over a six month period via a work-based learning mode whereby individuals spend between one and five days per week working on the production of the service development proposal aimed at improving services to the local community.

The new youth strand is aimed at developing the skills of staff in working with young people to improve services and has a particular focus upon the development of services to young refugee and asylum seeker communities. One of the problems of alternative approaches to management learning and development is the relatively low degree of transfer of learning to the workplace and, as the programme is designed as a service development project which takes place at work, it attempts to overcome this limitation by drawing upon social learning theory and behavioural role modelling in the development of leadership skills for the staff taking part.

A significant part of the underlying philosophy behind the QLP was that the person being developed would be exposed to a number of opportunities to interact with much more senior decision-makers within their organizations and would do so in a very visible way within both their own organisations and also within the socially excluded partnership communities with whom they work, thereby enlisting a social identity approach to their development while at the same time drawing in these local communities in the development of services for them. The approach drew upon the expertise in public sector entrepreneurship and innovation management of staff based at London Metropolitan University's Management Research Centre (e.g. Bartlett, 2003; Bartlett and Dibben, 2002; Dibben and Bartlett, 2001). At the heart of the QLP lies the 'development project' and an underlying assumption of the approach is that the development project is critical in developing the new know-how that any new service will require for its design and delivery.

The development project is of 6 months duration and is located within a formal project management framework. The person in charge of managing this

project is the Quality Leader, who is responsible for establishing, convening and leading a part time project team, the Development Team, who are charged with the development of a new service based upon the results of a consultation process with the community. The role of the Development Team is to carry out such activities as may be specified by the Quality Leader in consultation with team members and, in order for this process to work in the context of the pressured realities of organisational life and the demands being made upon potential members of the project team, it is essential that each Quality Leader is supported by two key people from within his or her organisation (a Project Sponsor and a Mentor). In leading this team, the aim is to develop an idea for a new service which is based upon a thorough consultation with the community, and which involoves planning operational processes, resources and implementation steps and developing a formal proposal for the new service.

The learning and service development aspects of the QLP are inherently intertwined in the structure of the QLP programme. This structure follows a fixed scheme consisting of six key areas in a specific order: QLP induction, project management, consultation, best value and performance, service design and service implementation planning.

Embedded within the formal learning structure are a number of new modules that bring awareness of essential requirements that often get ignored in other learning experiences. These are "combating racism/ managing equality" and "managing youth service". The former was developed specifically for the previous strand of QLP and aims at equipping participants with awareness of issues of racism and equality, both from a theoretical and legal point of view as well giving examples of practical approach of mainstreaming equality in all aspects of local authority work. The latter – "managing youth service" is being introduced for the youth strand of QLP. It will bring the best aspects of youth work as required by recommendations from the National Youth Agency and recent legislation on working with young people. Again, a practical approach will be taken and example of creative partnership between libraries and youth service will be used throughout.

Added to the above, will be lessons and experiences of working with young refugees and asylum seekers. Participants will be made aware of best practice from the "Welcome to your Library" project which is funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and managed by the London Libraries Development Agency.

The first component, QLP induction, takes place at the very beginning of the project and introduces and explains the QLP and sets out the expectations which will be made upon the various stakeholders. In particular, the Quality Leaders themselves are introduced to the notion of leading the Project Team and the sorts of negotiation and persuasion skills which are going to be required, as well as sensitising them to the types of skills they should be trying to develop and emphasising the importance of taking responsibility for their own learning and development through activities such as attending the formal

learning sessions, reading the provided texts, acquiring and reading supplementary material and maintaining a learning log book.

The experience of the Quality Leaders in leading the Development Team is potentially more effective in developing distinctive and valuable sets of know-how and expertise which are particularly suited to service development and innovation and which are difficult to acquire and successfully transfer through conventional training formats. Other, more general management competencies can, if necessary, be developed through supplementary conventional training in specific competency areas such as managing people, managing budgets and managing information and services.

The formal training sessions, consisting of presentations, discussions and action learning sessions, together with learning logs, action planning charts and reading material provide the formal components of the QLP learning and development framework. This formal framework is supplemented by on-the-job experience actually during the period of the development project. The approach is therefore one of learning by doing, however this 'secondment' model of development is supplemented by the Behavioural Role Modelling approach which is provided by the Mentor. Such an approach is particularly suited to the development of leadership skills (Barker, 2001) as it provides a framework whereby the phenomenological experience of leadership occurs during the action and prior to the application of existing knowledge gained through conventional approaches to training and development such as that embodied within a managerial competencies framework.

That public libraries need to change is now being increasingly recognised. That they need to change the way they deliver services to young people has not been fully understood. While most libraries provide a reasonably satisfactory service for children, they generally fail when it comes to providing imaginative and relevant services to those between the ages of 13-24. Boagey (2003) poses an important challenge to the profession: "Young people need to be at the heart of transforming libraries."

There is not much evidence that that challenge is being taken up seriously by most public libraries. This is the very area in which the QLP-Youth fills an important gap. The model provides a way of consulting young people to be active partners in developing a new service that meets their needs. In the process it ensures partnership working with youth services. It ensures the long-term sustainability of the new services in two ways. First, it develops youth skills in staff through funds provided by the National Youth Agency. Library professionals are not youth workers and so often lack the skills to connect with young people.

Another way the programme will help develop sustainable services is through funding provided by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation which will help to implement the service over a 2-year period. This should provide sufficient time to make structural adjustments in the library authority to mainstream new youth services.

Thus the programme addresses the various challenges that libraries need to meet: service development, staff development, meeting the needs of an excluded community (youth generally, but also refugees and asylum-seeker youth). It focuses on meeting the *needs* of all young people, whether from ethnic minority or ethnic majority groups. It encourages all young people to work together, fulfilling a key challenge for building social cohesion.

Change is an unchartered territory which frightens some people. But not changing will retard the much needed development of public libraries in a new direction. QLP-Youth is an important way of reversing this trend. Jon Boagey (2003) makes an uncompromising demand for change:

> Their (young people's) active involvement in shaping the service will make their libraries into places where the customer leads, not the staff. If libraries want to find a place for young people that isn't just an awkward spot between the bean bags, there needs to be a radical shift in the way users are involved in the service. Now is the time to make it happen.

QLP-Youth is *the* programme to enable authorities to make the radical shift in delivering a relevant library service and, whilst the approach has already been tested in relation to other excluded communities through its earlier phases, it is through the continued commitment of the funders and the hard work of staff and the communities themselves that this innovative approach towards the development of both services and staff will lead to lasting changes in the way libraries interact with their users. If you would like to find out more about the QLP programme, or are interested in taking up the approach within your own authority then please contact Shiraz Durrani (Shiraz.Durrani@merton.gov.uk) or Dean Bartlett (D.Bartlett@londonmet.ac.uk).

References

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Notes

1. The Quality Leaders Project was "highly commended" at the CILIP Diversity Awards which were "for outstanding achievement in the promotion of the principles of diversity, equal opportunities and social inclusion through the provision and promotion of library and information services" on 21 November 2003.

2. Further details on the QLP available at its website: http://www.seapn.org.uk/qlp.html