

AN EXPLORATION OF THINGS TO CONSIDER FOR THE DISTANCE LEARNING

OF MANAGEMENT SKILLS

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An exploration of things to consider for the distance learning of management skills

Purpose

This paper is being written in an attempt to clarify my thinking about the learning of management skills by learners partly or completely at a distance from the person who has the responsibility for facilitating the learning. This clarification process is required before attempting a dissertation on the same area, in order to highlight things which require detailed consideration within the dissertation.

Plan of the Paper

1. How I came to be involved. - An explanation of how I became involved and why I found writing this paper so difficult to start with.
2. Terms used - Clarification of meanings of terms such as distance, open, management skills, etc., which are used very differently by different authors.
3. My views on some important considerations together with the views of two students collected in open ended discussion around Henley packages.
4. Views from the literature, which may provide a base for developing a distance learning strategy.
5. Conclusions, including a framework to view the trade-offs involved in designing a distance learning system.

How I came to be involved

There have been two independent pressures involving separate sequences of events which have brought me to consider the topic. The first was attendance at an ATM Seminar on Open and Distance Learning on the 4th July 1983 in London. I was not at the time particularly interested in Open and Distance Learning. It was mainly an excuse to meet other MAML I participants as a result of an invitation from John Burgoyne who was using the day as a seminar for his tutorial group as well as presenting a paper. A short paper was written on the day's experience which included in its circulation a member of the Polytechnic Directorate. This in turn led to a "private" discussion with a Director at his invitation in which it was learned large sums were likely to be available for preparation of Distance learning materials. I was drafted onto the "Open Learning Committee". Proposals for development of open learning materials were presented to the Polytechnic by the Head of my School of Operations Management including the topic areas of "Management Skills" "Quality Assurance". Both of these have been picked for further development.

The second sequence begins with my first term at the Polytechnic when I became involved in running a course for NACRO (National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders) in Management Skills in Residential and Day Care for Managers in charge of such units as Probation Hostels, Cyrenian Hostels, Mental Handicap and Elderly Person establishments.

It was the experience of this course that led me eventually to consider a management skills approach instead of being restricted to a management knowledge or a management techniques approach to learning. It seems not unreasonable to conclude from the reputation established and favourable evaluation from learners, organisations, external assessment bodies and other research that a considerable degree of expertise has been built up in facilitating the learning of management skills in many different course environments.

It was almost because of this success or rather the lack of a clear conception of what elements were leading to the success that I enrolled in

MAML. I wanted to understand so that I could continue to facilitate learning to satisfactory outcomes for learners and myself.

These then are the sequences which have led to my considering the topic of the distance learning of management skills which I approached with some scepticism. Despite spending at least as much time as usual for a seminar paper, reading, questioning and probing, the feelings picked up by Gitte, Patricia and Richard from a draft part of the paper read at the seminar on the 30th January, were that there was a lack of interest and enthusiasm. I agreed that I was finding it a bit like rolling a snowball up a hill. Richard suggested I should perhaps consider the "nature" of the hill, which I have found useful to do. It soon became clear when considering the "nature" why I was not enthusiastic. Put simply, if I were to spend my time devising distance learning of management skills I could be eliminating some of the major parts of the job which are important to me. I would no longer be interacting with learners, seeing them learn and change. I had chosen to lecture mainly because of this interaction and the strengths that I felt I had to deal with it. However, this "self-destruct" problem was not the only one unearthed. If distance learning is to mean that learners are isolated not only from the tutor, but from other learners, it would not be possible to use the advances made in understanding how to use learners' differences to enhance learning (as discussed in my last seminar paper).

The ATM conference had re-enforced the view that very little success was being claimed in teaching management skills at a distance. Nearly all the information being gathered seemed to be re-enforcing the view that distance learning was primarily being used for closed-ended learning of knowledge, even if it was learning what different views there are on a topic! The pace was still controlled to ease administration, even if it did allow a certain freedom of intake speed. The primary driving force seemed to be a reduction in unit cost by high volume sales of a standardized package. Assessment methods seemed to be largely one dimensional and highly mechanised with built in

safeguards to avoid cheating. All this seems to clash with the more open-ended view of the nature of learning outcomes which I described by analogy to photochemical reactions in the project essay (see Appendix I).

So why have I found enthusiasm to tackle the subject now? Simply because by considering how to do it, one is forced to clarify what it is that you are trying to achieve and how one normally achieves it in the setting one has become used to. You remember you have learnt from books, tapes and papers and converted them to learning activities for others. You remember you have done this sometimes without inter-action with others. The consideration of distance learning could well be one of the best ways to tidy up one's thinking and perhaps do better at current activities. her thoughts on the terms used are presented next as the first step in clarification.

II TERMS USED

These are my own formulations made after reading the literature and considering it. I have searched in vain for a consistent view or consensus on them. People are either confused or confusing about them.

DISTANCE

It would be simplest to take the "black box" view that it means tutor and learner never meet or have direct contact and learners also never meet. However, distance seems to imply varying degrees of contact of the parties between the officially recognised start and the end of the learning period. To qualify for being called distance learning the degree of contact should be less than that found on a traditional face to face course. This in my view means that MANR, for example could be described as partly distance learning due to the low contact time. Physical distance Em be the cause of low contact or no contact. Substitute "tutors" i.e. persons other than course designers may provide some, if not all of any contact. So this characteristic of a course, "distance", does not rule out entirely tutor-learner, learner-learner contact.

LEARNING

I would want to distinguish between surface learning - an increase' in the knowledge of facts that are in a person's memory - and deep level learning as an abstraction of meaning and an interpretive process aimed at the understanding of reality. A learner is the person in whom either of these processes is occurring.

SKILLS AND MANAGEMENT SKILLS

These terms are best understood by considering what a skilled performance looks like. It is a matter of "getting it all together" rather than separate activities. All the effort is focussed, there is a purpose present and there is an element of precision in timing in a skilled performance. A management skill requires: perception skills - seeing or hearing or using other senses to pick up information and checking it against a conceptual map so as to give an idea of what to do; motor skills - muscle and joint activities

seen as verbal non-verbal behaviour, e.g. using eye-contact to draw another's attention; executive skills - the co-ordination of perception and motor skills to some purpose. These executive skills deteriorate with tiredness and fatigue. I would suggest that outward bound type experiences are to some extent about development of the executive skills by "training" to prolong the Ability to maintain control over motor and perception skills.

So far this description could be applied to any skill - including the skills of a trapeze artist where the lack of "getting it all together" could result in a fall. This example illustrates the difficulty of a skills approach to learning. With a well written description I am sure I could develop a good perceptual map of being a trapeze artist but I would not have developed the skills of performance. Without feedback on performance, practice on my own would I suspect be slow and painful! In my experience, it is particularly in the non-verbal outcome of their motor activities that management learners are in need of feedback.

Below are some examples of what I consider to be management skills; I would divide these into three main classes.

(i) Personal skills, e.g. the effective use of time, report writing, storing and retrieving information

Face to face skills - giving a talk, interviewing, disciplining

(iii) Group and team skills. Working as a member of a team, chairing, supporting.

The ever-present requirements of problem solving and decision making run through all of the classes.

OPEN

Ideally this should mean that anyone can commence the learning. In reality, many restraints prevent this mainly those associated with costs, either of provision or access. This description of open seems to be applied mistakenly by many writers to express learner control of the process. The major users of the term, e.g. Open University, are associated with tighter administrative

control than in face to face learning. It is true that the learner does choose when to do the learning but often within a very tight time schedule. The learner has very little control over aims, content or method.

INDEPENDENT

This word seems to be a more useful one to describe a situation where the learner does have control over aims content and method as well as pace, i.e. he is independent of the tutor. Thus there can be degrees of independence which fit in with normal ideas of growth to maturity.

INDIVIDUALISATION

This is control of the content and materials by the tutor to adapt the learning to make it more relevant to particular persons or groups of persons. Like independence there are degrees of individualisation.

PART III

Two views of Important Considerations or Issues

I feel it is worthwhile to consider what might be important from two points of view. First, what is of importance to the designer of the learning, and secondly to the learner. It is recognised in the case of management skills learning that there is also a very strong possibility of influence by an employer who is more likely to be the "paying customer" than in say the case of an O.U. course. At the A.T.M. meeting the market research seemed to show organisations were in general looking for a "quick fix" and certainly not qualification courses which would make their managers more mobile in the job market. However it is felt the issues raised by using the two viewpoints take into account the possible influence from this quarter.

1. The Designers Viewpoint

Why start it at all?

The major reasons given for promotion of this mode of learning are that people are prevented from attending a centre due to travel time, travel cost, release problems, e.g. shift work, residential fees. Some students are prisoners. The evidence for this approach needs more careful scrutiny. Will these potential learners actually want to start? (See The Learners Viewpoint). What other alternatives are available? e.g. mobile learning centres with more conventional approaches - mobile tutors, etc. Whilst cost effectiveness is probably a very suitable criterion for a decision on starting, which costs are to be included will be difficult to get agreement on, and including different costs is likely to result in a different outcome.

What is the aim and purpose?

The overall aim that the learner should have improved his practice of management is fairly easily stated but certain component aims are more problematical.

I did not discuss the term management separately from skills as there is too much inconclusive discussion about it. In reality management is a wide spread activity which continues to affect the lives of people, whether it is good, bad or indifferent. It has been found important for the learners on our skills courses that they have identified by using several different frameworks what "management" is for them in their own context. It was stated that it repaid the effort because it made what followed more relevant and therefore easier to assimilate. How is this process to be incorporated?

The description of management skills given requires perception, motor and executive skills. Attention has to be paid not only to knowledge, and

skills but to feelings as well since all management involves interaction with others. Thus, the learning design must cater for knowledge skills and feelings otherwise it could be criticised for providing the equivalent of "swimming instruction without water" or "trapeze instruction without trapezes"!

Skills can be broken down to small sub-routines but it is the assembly of them which is critical to overall performance. For example, the brilliant pre-planning of a meeting with just the right balance of members, the correct ordering of events, the optimum seating arrangements, etc., may be undermined by the jerky, hesitant gesture of the chairman when trying to call the meeting to order. Part of the purpose must be trying to achieve the assembly of component skills.

(iii) Is the aim of the learning improvement or change?

This issue could be very important for design, as change can be seen to be both beneficial or potentially threatening depending on the viewpoint of the observer. Dealing out "subversive" materials could threaten the credibility of the learning designer or his employing organisation. It is not a new issue but one which is brought into sharper relief if the learning is open and there is therefore easier access. For example, we make extensive use of an organisation questionnaire which brings out people's views on the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation. A great deal of care goes into preparing the organisation to accept this approach.

Who is the Customer?

Is it an individual, a group of individuals, an organisation, or a particular industry or sector? This decision has major implications - openness; individualisation; independence. Volume will affect costs. The Henley and O.U. packages have obviously gone for a high volume which leads,

it would seem inevitably, to a highly standardised product (admittedly with a high quality of presentation) with the consequent trade off of very low levels of individualisation and independence.

It seems to me that organisations and agencies of various sorts, e.g. the M.S.C. are more likely to be the paying customers than individuals. This is in contrast to the O.U. which traditionally has individual customers. There is a well-established tradition of this organisational involvement and unless subsidised fees are available for individuals the costs are likely to be too high for them to afford thus making this closed rather than open learning. This organisational involvement could lead to greater organisational relevance but carries with it the potential danger of strong organisational constraints. The H.E. sector has been shown to overcome these constraints by the mixing of students in face to face learning (see my first seminar paper). What means of overcoming constraints are there bearing (iii) in mind?

(v) How open-ended are the learning designs?

My analogy of learning with photochemical reactions (see Appendix I) predicts that it is impossible to forecast all learning outcomes however standardised the learning event. In particular, despite the standardised "package" the learners' initial states are likely to show tremendous variety in skills development. It is this variety which has caused me to become more and more relaxed and open-ended about learning designs. This has meant that there is learner choice built in to the designs and flexibility of design during the running of events. How this is to be achieved at a distance is an interesting challenge and certainly problematical.

How much of the participants current management experience should be used?

Whilst it is true that extensive use of this has been made in the form of projects, action learning sets, time logs, etc., etc., the degree of

risk to which learners were exposing themselves could be monitored and major catastrophes averted by counselling. This may be a much more unpredictable process at a distance but provides a plentiful supply of opportunities. Exploration could repay the effort for understanding management learning in general.

(vii) How is the experience to be unpicked?

The complexity of experiences of managing are such that it is difficult to spot underlying principles in one situation and be able to transfer them to another. Otherwise there would be little need for management training and education! It is particularly in this unpicking process that having a group of learners has proved to be valuable on MAML. By using different frameworks and interpretations of events quite marked changes in understanding were reported by MAML, participants. What mechanisms can be provided 11-4e, particularly in the absence of other learners, will be without doubt a major area for investigation. This in itself could be of value in face to face teaching if some new ideas come to the surface.

viii How is feedback on performance of skills to be achieved?

This is obviously an issue closely linked to (vii). In the traditional face to face situation, there is not only the tutor but other learners around to give both verbal and non-verbal feedback. The situation can be perceived as much lower risk as it is a training situation in which mistakes can be made. The result is the generation of a great deal of information for feedback. What feedback processes are available and what training is required in interpretation of data seem to be major concerns.

What methods and materials are to be used?

Experimenting in this area seems to attract a great deal of interest and enthusiasm. The interest is such in the literature and amongst individuals associated with this area that I get the feeling that the purpose and the learner become only minor considerations. It has almost become the equivalent of the lecturer "ego trip", and with a fair amount of money being made available (e.g. Open Tech) some people are thoroughly enjoying an expensive trip. The issue here is that people are using high technology e.g. Interactive computer cases, interactive video, programmed learning on computer as solutions seeking problems, rather than trying to solve the problems which are present. There is alternatively the low technology end - study guides, work books, handouts which might provide an equally good or better solution. This thinking about the problem, and using the appropriate technology to solve it, is something for which I would make a strong plea.

The evidence from my research on the NACRO course and other evidence would indicate the need for a variety of learning methods even within a half hour period. How is variety going to be built in?

With skills learning, activity is essential, but how is this to be initiated?

(x) The tutor - can he be eliminated? What does he provide and how can this be supplied in other ways?

The tutor is an expensive commodity, but the message that came over loud and clear at the ATM conference was the importance of the tutor. It was said many times there, and I've heard it many times from O.U. students, "It doesn't work without the tutor." Why does it not work? What essential 'ingredients' does the tutor provide? At the top of my list would be the communication of enthusiasm and drive, creating the feeling that learning has

a reward. Genuine interest and enthusiasm spills over into all tutor-learner interactions - but not all tutors are enthusiastic so I cannot justify their retention on this ground. A tutor does obviously provide some flexibility to the learning, system, e.g. spotting and removing blocks to learning, may be just by repeating something in a different way.

Some solutions to distance are already being used - telephone, video tele-conferences, tape cassette conferences. What are their benefits and how much training of tutors would there have to be for this to be useful for management skills development?

Other learners - are they necessary? What do they provide and how can what they supply be provided in other ways?

My last seminar paper looked at how the differences of learners and what they brought with them - e.g. different learning approaches, organisational experience, life experience, ability, motivation and support - could be used to help learning. Whilst it is agreed that much learning is promoted without explicitly exploiting these, tea-breaks and other mixing events have always allowed the possibility of discussion and sharing of experience.

The CMS students report great confidence being derived from experimenting in groups of other learners, and getting feedback from them.

I feel the major benefit of our courses for the unemployed is not so much the content but that the learners get a fix (Nautical - "find bearings") on their identity and abilities. MY banking students taking the "Nature of Management" course attach a great deal of importance to the learning they get by reading each other's essays (all of which are on different topics and then shared by photocopying). They say it helps them assess their own ability and set standards.

If learners are at a distance, they will find themselves in a similar vacuum to the unemployed. Some mechanisms need to be found to supply these 'bearings'.

(xii) How is the learning to be evaluated?

This has been one of the main areas of contention for qualification. courses such as the CMS. Certainly, most people are convinced that exams or written work on its own are not suitable. It would be like testing cooking ability by assessing an essay on the history of French Cuisine - more dependent on their essay writing ability than culinary skills. In the CMS course, we have skill development taking place before the tutor's eyes (and the television camera). Our attempts to use joint assessment by tutor, organisational mentor, learner and peer assessment at the start, end and a year after the course have been found to be fraught with difficulties, particularly within the organisational context. In the case of distance learners, their starting states will be particularly difficult to assess.

For non-qualification courses the problems will still be present, even if the demands for a clear, consistent assessment are not so strident.

2. The Learners Viewpoint

I had already developed my own views on this but I was fortunate enough to be able to interview two people who had been given the opportunity to work through the two currently available Henley Packages. They both work for the same adhesive paper company, and one had been actively considering the O.U. management skills course, to which he frequently referred. One (call him A) had not started the "Effective Executive" package and two months later has still not started! The other (B) had commenced the "Accounting for Managers" package and was willing to write down some thoughts on it as he progressed through it. He has since completed it and talked to me about the experience. I have used the views expressed by collecting them under questions which I had formulated from my own notions of the concerns of the distance learner. They are not all expressed verbatim but only altered to ease reading.

e some of the stimuli to consider the use of distance learning?

A - "I've no experience of man-management and I recognise my knowledge of management skills is lacking. I may be doing a lot right - but I suspect I'm doing some things wrong.

I jumped in at the deep end in learning Dutch - life would not stop if I didn't succeed. Management matters - there would be a serious impact on your life if you don't succeed - you would be condemned for bad management.

The elusive pie in the sky M.B.A. is my ambition. I've got commercial awareness but there is nothing to say I've got it. People know what an M.B.A. is - it would do a world of good for the individual. The O.U. course would build up to an M.B.A. eventually."

B - "I'm not particularly interested in the package - I'm doing a D.M.S. so it is only being used to supplement my learning as a revision exercise.

It's fifteen years since I left school and I'm weak on management and finance.

I'm thick, I need a blanket approach and the package is very comprehensive - you can see, hear and read.

I'm being promoted to shift manager - I'd got to find another niche - lab techs don't go on for ever.

The Company is keen, I'm keen, my boss is very keen.

I had the opportunity of going to Ashridge - I weighed up the syllabus, but I wanted to be actively involved in it over a protracted period to get the most out of it. I need to immerse myself in it - to be more involved, therefore I chose the D.M.S.

I need to make a serious attempt. Using the package I'm hoping to get in advance of the D.M.S."

The main stimulus promoting interest unique to A is the desire for a 'ticket' whilst for B it is a support mechanism to other learning. A and B share a recognition of a deficiency, a desire to reduce a major risk, and have been given support and interest from the company generally and also from a particular individual (the Management Services Manager (responsible for training)).

What are the restraints to starting to use Distance Learning?

A - "I don't know about this Henley package - I was just handed it - a black box - for nothing - one regards it in a different light.

The O.U. course, I found out about it for myself - you take a lot more notice if you find out about something for yourself.

With the O.U. it took 100 hours over six months, but I was left with only 3 months and it was not possible to find this amount of time - that's why I've stalled.

I would not do a conventional course at the moment as I'm not settled."

(This last comment was used again in the follow up conversation as the main reason for justifying not starting the package at any time during the investigation).

B - "Lone learning suggests eccentricity - what do others think of me? - do they see me as failing using other methods? - I remember a cowboy series on the television in which the milkshake hero was doing his correspondence course on law at each new town - perhaps others view this sort of activity the same way."

It seems to me that there may be additional restraints to starting compared to a conventional course - but being sent on a distance package has similar effects to being sent on a conventional course.

(iii) What physical factors will help continuation of studies?

B - "I worked during the Christmas holiday doing three hours a day, using a routine of working in the morning.

I found if I'd been out running I could not take in simple statements.

The unit was very self-contained - the audio tape had less impact.

The written material had a good type face, short words with short sentences it was of such high quality and gave an air of confidence and quality - something so good that one was reluctant to give up. It's simply just got to be this quality. The content of Polytechnic handouts may be good but lacks this professional quality.

If I had not worked in the library but a bedroom I would have lost effectiveness - the informality would breed a lack of discipline - the set location and set time gave me structure.

I would have real problems if the pattern was broken as it was difficult to find the link between lessons - the lecturer normally does this.

There were no additional riders like lecturers' anecdotes to illustrate examples.

I found the frequent activity useful - doing the simple exercises - the ones you normally let the lecturer or the person sitting next to you do."

(iv) What individuals are influential in getting started and keeping going?

Both A and B had been given the packages by the Management Services Manager and regarded him as very approachable and would not hesitate to contact him if they needed to. The only others mentioned were their wives whom they claimed to be very supportive. A said his wife would probably watch the videos with him, and B reported strong support during the period of using the package. It would seem to me that spouse support for this sort of learning might need to be even stronger than for a conventional course with invasion of the home environment. B took himself to the library, worked over lunch time and stopped late at work, to avoid this problem as well as gain the right environment.

When considering the total experience, B attached the most significance to his following remarks.

"I lacked relationships, competition or discussion. I was in a VOID, a VACUUM. You learn more actively if someone is around.

I could have been learning slowly or fast. It would not matter if you were bright or dull the end would be the same, this would degrade the value of any qualification!

At the end I had no certainty of being able to perform.

There were no feelings at the emotional level, no relationship of pupil and teacher, no drive, no structure, no revision, no questions being asked to remind you of what you do or don't know."

These comments echo many of the problems which I had already raised from the designer's viewpoint.

What value is placed on the learner's experience to date?

B - "You need to get to know the jargon in the package - the package does not relate to your own place of work - but uses a Paints Company as a case study."

This would suggest no use is made of the learner's own experience. Even though adhesives and paints have similarities in production, B still had problems relating to it. This poses the question for me - is this one of the factors giving rise to the inability to assess the potential for performance?

How do I know how I am doing?

B - "I know from the people on the D.M.S. some of whom are younger and brighter than me that the package has got me to the average in the class, I'd have no idea otherwise."

The crunch came for me two weeks ago when I found the accounts of the working men's club I use sometimes, lying on the end of the bar. I picked them up, sat down with my pint and found I could understand them, and the club was doing quite well! If I'd been told to find something like that I'm sure it wouldn't have had the same meaning."

A - "On courses with other people - you get self-assessment against them, and peer assessment from them. Some of the home truths you get are hard to swallow. I don't see how you know with a package that's why I liked the O.U. package, you need the weekend away, and the exam, which I would take."

I want to highlight some things that came out of these interviews, though I fully recognise they were with only two individuals from the same employer though doing different jobs.

Firstly, A never started the package even though this package could

not have been made more open to him.

Secondly, B did not feel the tape cassettes had much impact.

Thirdly, B had not bothered to view the video.

Fourthly, it was the low technology printed part of the package which had the most impact.

Finally, there is still the lack of skills in practice and "getting it all together" even though B now can comment meaningfully on the club accounts.

This would suggest the package does not have much advantage over a book, and £200 plus seems a lot to pay for a book.

PART IV

Views from the Literature

Whilst there are several papers on aspects of the questions raised, very few relate to management and I could find none relating to distance learning of management skills. The most comprehensive sets of papers were to be found in "Teaching at a Distance" which is an O.U. publication and is therefore largely about O.U. matters. However, they underline rather than add to the issues raised.

I found "Learning and Working" by Frederick Denison Maurice (1805-1872) the founder of the Working Men's College, an early stimulation. In 1855, he was claiming that we should be trying to develop the whole personality which

is best provided for in a college where the advantages of corporate life could be enjoyed. He said, "teachers should be tutors and not professors and should give lessons rather than lectures, each to be followed by discussion in which all could be free to ask questions and express opinions."

I "discovered" or rediscovered in this book that adult education preceded education of the young, in that it was a Norman discipline for the men, not the children, to be educated. He claimed the Grammar schools had caused the decline of the teaching in universities due to their insistence on rote learning.

What has this got to do with the topic? Well he went on to say that ADULTS are people who have learnt from experience even when they have not learnt from books, and that any scheme should take into account their maturity and responsibility.

The other major stimulation was research on the differences between independent learners (people who had become recognised as experts in their own field after studying at leisure such subjects as ornithology, railway modelling or bee-keeping, sometimes over periods of many years) and correspondence students such as those from O.U. Brookfield S. (1983). He found independent learners did not have study 'problems', they just had enjoyable challenges, or interesting diversions which were a source of continuing interest and enjoyment. By contrast the correspondence students laboured under constraints and limitations and problems which could be put into seven broad categories. Independent learners were found to declare little interest in material resources declaring instead their preferences for consultation of peers and learning groups as sources of information particularly in casual encounters and informal conversations, though many had established extensive personal reference libraries. Another major difference was that independent learners attributed the stimulus to start to parental or spouse encouragement, particularly to their fathers, and early re-enforcement and support by their peers, whilst correspondence learners attributed the stimulus to a desire for intellectual stimulus and affirmation of self-esteem.

My main reason for recording these views apart from their interest to me is that they may provide an outlook which could help in developing a distance learning strategy - for example networks of distance learners similar to the ATM network which would encourage informal exchange, and give credit and make use of their experience.

PART V

CONCLUSIONS

"Academics should undergo a kind of conversion of the soul to become a new breed of academics favourably disposed to the distance-learning system."

Wichit Srisa-An (1981)

I have seen no blinding light on the road to Borwick Halls What I see is an interesting way of understanding how the learning of management skills can be enhanced.

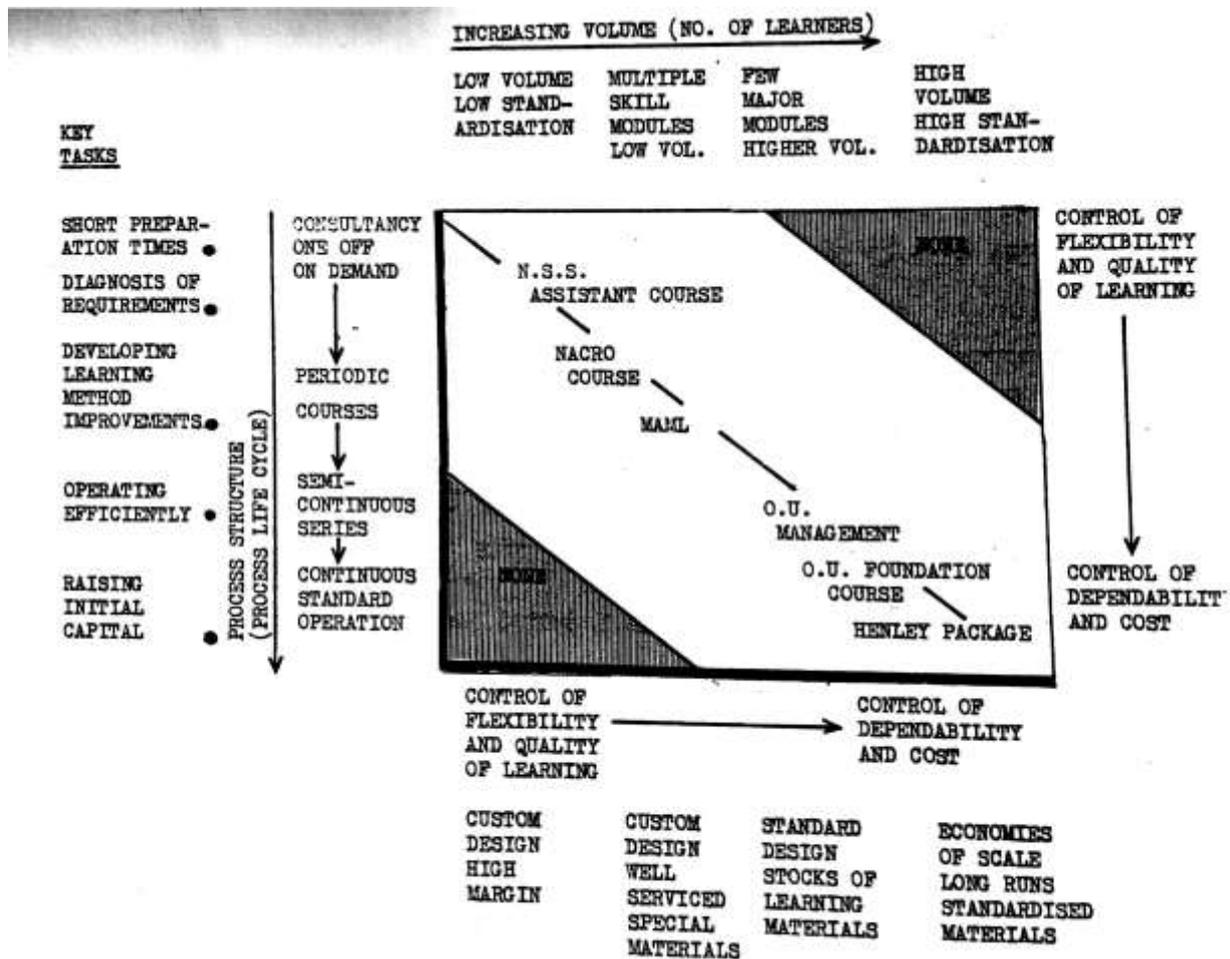
By attempting designs for the distance learning of management skills with as much learning as possible facilitated at a distance, one is forced to pick out those components which do not need these interactions. It should become clearer what requires tutor-learner, learner-learner, learner-others, group or solo learning. This could lead to more effective as well as efficient learning

generally. It will force consideration of how to use and facilitate learning opportunities in the day to day job of management. This should lead to developments in providing or sensitising people to feedback, particularly non-verbal feedback.

All of these offer interesting opportunities for a dissertation.

New technology may well assist with facilitating interaction at a distance by such means as video tele-conferences, but its uses and limitations will need to be explored so that appropriate training can be provided for tutors and learners. New technology may not necessarily dominate the transmission system. At present, it seems to be more of a solution looking for a problem.

FIG 1 A FRAMEWORK FOR VIEWING THE TRADE-OFFS OCCURRING WITH DIFFERENT MODELS OF DISTANCE LEARNING



Whilst working on this paper many of the issues being raised seemed similar to those which have to be thought through when choosing a process system for manufacturing organisation. Are we going for flexibility, volume, dependability, quality? What technology is available? The similarity was sufficient for me to make a tentative attempt at basing a framework (see Fig 1) on the ideas of Hayes, R.M. and Wheelwright, S.L. (1979). They used their framework to discuss trade-offs occurring in the choice of a manufacturing process, recognising the dynamic nature of the decisions.

The vertical side of the matrix is the type of process used to assemble or design courses. This has been described at present by using the output, i.e. the types of courses. It was difficult to find terms that would be universally understood to describe the processes that went into their design. The horizontal side of the matrix represents increasing volume.

Flexibility is to be understood in terms of independence for the learner, individualisation, and open-endedness of learning outcomes. It is seen to be reduced with increasing volume.

Quality of learning is high, with more deep-level learning, in low volume situations.

Dependability of the outcome of surface level learning increases with standardisation, but there is a reduction in deep level learning.

Moving off the diagonal to higher volume whilst maintaining the same flexibility is likely to result in higher costs. Moving towards lower flexibility is likely to lower costs but to reduce the quality of learning. Either strategy may lose learners.

The "NONE" areas mark areas of impossibility i.e. I am saying that I think it is impossible to have a 'Henley' type package that is flexible and produces deep level learning.

I have tried to suggest how the key tasks of those responsible for designing the distance learning might vary as the process structure changes.

Some of the examples used need further description for everyone to understand fully their place on the diagonal, but what I have tried to do is to give several examples familiar to the known readers of this paper.

To try and illustrate how the framework can be used, consider MAML. I place it where I do because it is a periodically presented course (i.e. expected to start once a year) and it has multiple skill modules within it e.g. determining purposes, evaluation etc. and it has a low volume of learners. Note that as the second MAML came into being (a move down towards semi-continuous), a course administrator had to be appointed. Richard has tried to arrange seminars of MAML 1 and 2 on consecutive days. As MAML 1 moves into the option stage a movement up the framework is predicted, to-give flexibility and quality. This is in the opposite direction to the move brought about by MAML 2, so that tension is created within the system. It is noted that C.S.M.L. use some parts of MAML and offer them as workshops. Although the workshops would not at first sight be seen as examples of distance learning they involve preparation beforehand and practice after at a distance. It can be seen that their flexibility to learners is reduced by their specialisation. However, they are of a much more standardised design with perhaps more predictable outcomes than MAML. This places them further down the diagonal.

Most production processes are hybrids of systems, the more efficient organisations have clearly separated those parts which need craftsmanship and those which can be mechanised. Looking at the components of distance learning with this framework may help to decide the advantages and disadvantages of a particular approach.

Whilst I certainly feel I have clarified my thoughts I do not yet know if I have communicated them to others because I've done it at a distance.

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*This was particularly helpful in its discussion of the term Independent.

A P P E N D I X

(An extract from Project Essay)

At the philosophical level, it might be thought that because of my seven years of post-school scientific research and education that I would be at the hard-nosed "scientific" end of the spectrum rather than the "naturalistic" end. However, the very experience tells me that there must be so little control or even knowledge of active variables in any of the learning situations that I am involved with that "scientific" evaluation is not possible. Even if it were possible to control all of the variables the chances of the results being useful in terms of setting up subsequent identical learning situations are nil. There is a strong parallel here: - in a photochemical reaction (learning situation) thousands of molecules or atoms (participants) are brought together in as many random and different excited states and exposed to a flash of light (learning energy) the result is thousands of different products (learning products). Most of these fall apart and return to something like their original state within a few micro-seconds, other products remain, sometimes in reasonably large quantities (detectable learning?) many others are present in minute quantities which may only make their presence known in subsequent reactions. Alter the conditions, e.g. temperature, pressure, light intensity or wavelength, and the results are different; introduce different radicals and the results are Again different. In short one may expect to find some of the same learning product by similar processing and setting up an investigating system to detect it, but equally well many other products may occur which the investigating system cannot detect.

In the case of learning research, the detection system is likely to "contaminate" the reaction and may act as a catalyst and promote learning, but the products or some of them will be different. What is being suggested here is that being involved in detection may give greater levels of awareness of learning products but affect results, whilst distanced investigation will only detect one or two products of learning.