To what extent do levels of learning exhibited on personal development assignments translate into learning and attainment outcomes for senior leaders on management education programmes?

Our questions, interests and concerns:

Higher education has been increasingly criticized as ineffective in preparing graduates for the workplace with key skills and behaviours such as giving and receiving feedback and being courageous and brave. Some HEI programmes are aiming to address this through the integration of personal development (PD) modules that encourage learners to reflect on these attributes. Our interest in these modules is from a UK context through the government supported Senior Leaders Apprenticeship scheme.

By its very nature PD extends beyond the delivery of a subject content to require learners to engage in reflexive practice around who they are and how they position their learning in the context of their broader lives. The value of critical reflexivity for managers has been debated extensively by management education scholars (e.g. Cunliffe and Hibbert) but it can be hard to teach and learn. Many PD modules make use of different forms of reflective writing; and we use this as one of the assessment methods on the programme.

The emphasis personal development modules place on developing reflexivity aligns with prior research into orientations to learning which focus on understanding why some students engage with learning through meaning making whilst others do not. Orientations have been defined by Beaty et al. as '*all those attitudes and aims which express the student's individual relationship with the course of study'*. Early work (Marton and Saljo) found that, when faced with a learning task, students engaged in either deep or surface cognitive processing, manifested as a focus on abstraction, understanding and developing as a person or with memorisation and acquisition of concepts. Later researchers proposed an additional orientation known as the strategic approach, characterised by intentions to adopt good time management and study methods and understanding of the assessment requirements and marking schemes.

Deep learning, with its concern around meaning and abstraction appears particularly relevant for students engaging in PD, similarly the strategic or achieving approach has been described by previous commentators such as Haggis and Entwistle as a way for learners to achieve successful deep learning outcomes.

Earlier commentators (Dummer et al) have written about the importance of reflective writing, pointing out that reflection is crucial in the promotion of 'deep learning' however, we recognise that not all students are able to write reflectively. We are interested to explore whether learners who enjoy higher levels of academic success on the programme appear to evidence a deep learning orientation in their reflexive personal development assignments.

We therefore suggest the following **questions, interests and concerns** for the Unconference and look forward to the discussions developing:

1. We are **concerned** about how we design an inclusive range of learning activities to develop the reflexivity necessary for deep learning.
2. We are **questioning** the approach we might adopt to discern whether students are evidencing a deep learning orientation in their personal development assignments?
3. We are **interested** to explore if a relationship appears to exist between deeper levels of learning and programme outcomes.

References

Beaty, E., Gibbs, G. & Morgan, A. (1997) Learning orientations and study contracts, in: F. Marton, D. Hounsell & N. Entwistle (Eds) The experience of learning: implications for teaching and studying in higher education (Edinburgh, Scottish Academic Press), 3–22

Cunliffe, A. (2002). Reflexive Dialogical Practice in Management Learning. *Management Learning,* 33(1): 35-61.

Dummer TJ, Cook IG, Parker SL, et al. (2008) Promoting and assessing 'deep learning'in geography fieldwork: An evaluation of reflective field diaries. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 32(3): 459-479.

Entwistle, N.J., & Ramsden, P. (1983). Understanding Student Learning. London: Croom Helm

Haggis T (2003) Constructing images of ourselves? A critical investigation into 'approaches to learning'research in higher education. *British Educational Research Journal* 29(1): 89-104.

Hibbert, P. (2012). Approaching Reflexivity through Reflection: Issues for Critical Management Education. *Journal of Management Education* 37(6) 803 –827.

Marton, R & Saljo, R. [1984] Approaches to learning, in: F. Marton, D Hounsell & N. Entwistle (Eds) The Experience of Learning (Edinburgh, Scottish Academic Press)