

‘Talking the talk’ – a discursive approach to evaluating management development

Lisa Anderson*

University of Liverpool Management School, Liverpool, UK

(Received 30 November 2009; final version received 15 February 2010)

Much evaluation practice is guided by a theoretical anachronism. Systematized and formulaic approaches of chain reaction models of evaluation are based on conceptions of management which are over 50 years old. This study presents an evaluation of a management development intervention which used evidence of discursive shift in learners as an indicator of attitudinal and behavioural change brought about by the learning programme. The approach taken characterizes the learning event and the evaluation process as interventions which have the capacity to help learners to shape their identity and in which language is a mediator of learning. The results of the study, which applies both quantitative and qualitative techniques, are used to argue in favour of the deployment of a model of evaluation which has a focus on social and relational aspects of a managers’ role.

Keywords: evaluation; management development; discursive shift; learning

Introduction

Human resource development (HRD) practitioners are under increasing pressure to prove the impact of their work and in particular, to provide evidence of their contribution to their organization’s strategic objectives. This obligation to measure results and to prove causality between HRD interventions and business performance has led to the continuing reliance upon a theoretical model of evaluation which is over 50 years old. Kirkpatrick’s (1959a, 1959b, 1960a, 1960b) model reflects a mechanistic and scientific approach to the practice of management which is outmoded and increasingly rare in modern organizations. This model of the evaluation of HRD persists because it has high face validity – it actually looks as though it should work. There are few other areas of management in which we call upon such theoretical anachronisms to guide practice.

It is timely to consider the evaluation theory and practice of HRD and this paper focuses on management development in particular as a ‘messy’ and ‘fuzzy’ activity in much the same way as several observers have conceptualized management itself (e.g. Mintzberg 1994; Grint 1997; Shotter and Cunliffe 2003). Evaluation models

*Email: l.anderson@liverpool.ac.uk

and practice are often underpinned by the idea of assessing the value and worth of management development activities, justifying investment and measuring the return on investment (Stewart 1999). However, the way in which prevailing evaluation models encourage us to view worth and value is influenced by positivist research traditions which lead to a focus on quantifiable outcomes and which disregard the complex relational and dialogical activity in which most managers engage.

Here, an alternative perspective on the evaluation of management development is proposed which, using Easterby-Smith's (1994) framework, has learning rather than proving or controlling as its central purpose. I draw on social constructionist approaches to conceptualizing management work and learning (Shotter 1993; Gergen 1999; Shotter and Cunliffe 2003; Cunliffe 2002) and represent management as a dialogical and relational activity in which action and learning are mediated by language. In this context, the language that managers use becomes integral to their effective performance and therefore warrants a detailed examination as a potential outcome of management development. To this end, the paper offers findings and conclusions from a study at a multinational IT services company which sought to measure learning using discursive shift within a group of managers who attended a management development event.

The paper begins with a review of existing models of evaluation and offers a critique of the 'chain reaction' approach. It provides a rationale for a discursive approach to the evaluation of management development and describes how linguistically located studies inform the methodology of the study. Data from the study are presented and the conclusion offers a discussion of how a holistic and social view of evaluation can add to both theory and practice.

Kirkpatrick's model

The literature on evaluation of HRD is dominated by Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrickesque approaches (for example, Warr 1969; Warr, Bird, and Rackham 1970; Whitelaw 1972; Hamblin 1974; Blanchard and Thacker 1999) and there is no distinct and current literature on the evaluation of management development. Donald Kirkpatrick's (1959a, 1959b, 1960a, 1960b) 'Chain Reaction' model of evaluation is the approach which most trainers and developers attempt to employ in a range of situations. It is based on the principle that there are five distinct stages of learning and change which can be measured to gauge the impact of the learning programme in a 'chain reaction' sequence. The premise of the model is that training leads to (measurable) reactions which manifest themselves in the form of learning outcomes which (assuming these outcomes are those which the training sought to bring about) lead to changes in job behaviour and ultimately, organizational-level changes. In practice, this 'chain' often breaks down when attempts are made to link a programme's learning outcomes to the effects on job behaviours because of the difficulty of linking distal effects to a single intervention. Evaluation is then limited to an assessment of reactions through an end-of-course questionnaire and some testing of learning outcomes which can be built into the programme methodology. This may be useful in its own right, particularly as a means of validating the actual programme, yet the practice of looking out from the learning programme to find its effects in job behaviour and organizational outcomes creates a distance between the learner and the consequences of the learning. In doing so, it may fail to address the

question of how managers might meaningfully change their practice and their thinking as a result of attending a programme because the search for outcomes rather than for changes in practice becomes the central focus of evaluation. Most evaluation models are designed for training interventions rather than management development situations. There are significant differences between the two yet this is not always reflected in the evaluation approach; management development practitioners may try to 'fit' their evaluation approach to a model that is not designed for their specific purpose and which consequently works to the detriment of an examination of managers' practices which, I suggest here, may be more appropriate for a management development intervention.

Harrison (2000) builds on the work of Warr, Bird, and Rackham (1970) to produce her *CIRO* framework which suggests what the focus of evaluation should be. This model acknowledges the 'reactions' and 'outcomes' elements of the Kirkpatrick model and suggests that 'context' and 'inputs' should also be held up to scrutiny. It provides a more rounded view of where the focus of evaluation should lie but, as with other models, it presents a picture of evaluation as a clear process with discrete steps and measures. One of the problems with such models lies in trying to disentangle and then re-connect individual learning and organizational performance in a rather sterile way. It is as though evaluators have to track a piece of 'learning' moving systematically through the organizational system. It is for these reasons that some organizations either do not try to evaluate Management Development (MD) beyond the reactions stage and accept its contribution to organization performance as an 'act of faith' (Winterton and Winterton 1997).

Holton (1996) critiques chain reaction models by identifying them as merely taxonomies or classification schemes and indicating that relationships between each level have not been demonstrated by research. Holton proposes an alternative model which focuses on factors that influence learning such as motivation and the environment and secondary intervening variables such as 'intervention readiness' and personality characteristics. Lewis and Thornhill (1994, 26–27), advocating a culturally related approach to evaluation (after Brinkerhoff 1988) offer six reasons for the ineffectiveness of evaluation:

- (1) The confounding variables effect: difficult to disentangle the effect of training from other stimuli.
- (2) The non-quantifiable effect; how do you quantify the effects of, for example, a teambuilding event?
- (3) The costs outweighing the benefits effect: follow-up evaluation may cost more than the original problem (Buckley and Caple 1990).
- (4) The act of faith effect; training is a good thing *per se*.
- (5) The trainer sensitivity effect: evaluations may point out trainer weaknesses.
- (6) The organizational political effect: evaluations which show up poor training may indicate incorrect decisions by senior managers. This also provides a rationale for not evaluating at all.

This paper addresses the second of these issues and deals with the practice elements of management. I suggest, however, that instead of theorizing evaluation in this context as a systematized process, an examination of the way managers' talk about their practice before and after the learning intervention will reveal a different picture of any changes which occur as a result of it.

The nature of management and management development

Traditional models of evaluation are premised on a behaviourist concept of individual learning, on a highly structured approach to Management Development and on an outmoded characterization of the role of the trainer-as-instructor in the MD process. Few modern MD interventions could be characterized in this way. The various chain reaction models are products of their era and implicitly base their work on the idea that management itself is a planned and ordered activity – as classical management theorists such as Fayol (1949) and Taylor (1947) would have us believe.

The desire to crystallize the essence of the management black box into simple algorithms has persisted and been driven by concerns of government, academics and some managers themselves to codify and professionalize management. The management task and role is often analyzed and simplified to a point whereby it is presented in a simple, tick box manner as a skill that is learnable in a number of steps. This leads to a secondhandedness in learning which does nothing to develop learners within the context of the reality of managing in an organization and effectively translates into a ‘banking’ model of education (Freire 1972) reflecting the positivist tradition of presenting management as a clearly definable and orderly activity. Management development evaluations often follow this lead and the literature is permeated by a performative, ROI-focused discourse (see, for example, Huczynski and Lewis 1980 and Blanchard, Thacker, and Way 2000). Easterby-Smith (1994, 35) sums up many of the criticisms of systematic evaluation by coining the phrase ‘systems fallacy’ to explain how evaluation data collected in this way can only provide retrospective information and that in order to inform radical change in programme design, more creative evaluation processes are required.

From a contrasting perspective, conceptualizing management as a practice means that it cannot be reduced to a clear set of knowledge indicators, arranged in an orderly framework and there is therefore a need to ensure that management development activities focus not only on what managers need to *know* and the performance outcomes expected of them, but also on how they need to *be*. This idea of *being* a manager draws attention to the central activities of building relationships and promoting dialogue in the manager’s role. Shotter (1993) refers to a ‘contextualized form of knowing which only comes into being in the course of acting within the social situation within which it is known’. Gergen (1999) points to the centrality of language and the creation of shared meanings in social constructionism and proposes that language constitutes social life itself and that it is inextricably linked with learning:

As we describe, explain or otherwise represent, so do we fashion our future. Language not only generates meaning but shapes present and future reality. We must develop generative discourses that challenge the status quo and help us understand and shape the future. (Gergen 1999, 49)

Reed (1989) distinguishes between this theoretical perspective on management from others by terming it ‘management as social practice’ and differentiates it from the more recognizable technical, political and critical perspectives on management. Whilst social constructionist approaches to management research are accepted at the margins of the management academy, there is little evidence to suggest that social constructionist approaches to evaluating management development have a strong currency. However, if a social constructionist approach to conceptualizing and

organizing management development activity is felt to be useful (see, for example, Devins and Gold 2002) then a similar approach to making language central to its evaluation may also be helpful.

This dominance of the systematic approach, to the detriment of social approaches, is rooted in the notion that the central purpose of evaluation is to 'prove' that learning has occurred. Proving is one of the four main purposes of evaluation proposed by Easterby-Smith (1994, 14) along with improving, learning and controlling. Traditional evaluation approaches tend to define the success of a management development intervention in terms of prescribed learning outcomes. This microscopic analysis of the learning and development process leads to an examination of the minutiae of managers' behaviour rather than attempting to assess their practice in the round. So, success in an intervention such as a Coaching Skills workshop might normally be defined in terms of participants being able to ask clarifying questions and to explain the difference between formal and informal coaching. However, if the evaluation acknowledged that process and outcomes are interlinked then an examination of how managers might talk with coachees in a different way and talk about their coaching experiences with a new insight could not only provide valuable data but also add to the learning experience itself. The impact of a learning event on this new way of being in relation to others – the essence of the management task – is as a legitimate a focus for evaluation as any other.

There is some resonance here with integrated models of HRD (Brinkerhoff 1988; Lewis and Thornhill 1994; Bates 2004) yet none of these approaches has used the conceptualization of management as a relational and dialogical activity as their basis. Central to this idea of social practice is the premise that language mediates action in the workplace and that managers are 'practical authors' (Shotter and Cunliffe 2003). This view of management sits in sharp contrast to the idea of managers as 'practical scientists' (Pavlica, Holman, and Thorpe 1997) which negates the social and conversational aspects of being a manager. Therefore, the focus of the data collection and analysis in the study described below is on how managers talk and how their language might offer us a reflection of their practice.

Analysing 'discursive shift'

There are a wide range of approaches to analyzing spoken or written text which researchers may deploy. In linguistically located studies, discourse analysis is the study of spoken or written language through the examination of syntax, intonation, grammar, register, semantics, linguistic structure, arguments and the social context of language (sociolinguistics). It is used in a wide range of disciplines including applied linguistics, social psychology, politics, history and sociology. 'Text' may be either written or spoken discourse, the latter normally transcribed from a conversation, speech or other forms of spoken language. Text may be analyzed using fairly well established procedures and a system of graphic conventions to annotate the text.

Organizational discourse as a field of management enquiry has grown significantly since the early 1990s (Grant, Keenoy, and Oswick 2001) and 'discursive practices are deeply implicated in a wide range of processes of organizing, and the behavior of, an organization's members' (Grant, Keenoy, and Oswick 2001, 8). Alvesson and Kärreman (2000a, 137) refer to the linguistic or discursive turn in the social sciences and they discuss how organizations, societies and cultures 'may be viewed as

discursively constructed ensembles of texts'. They also suggest that it is often difficult to make sense of what is meant by discourse. They differentiate between two broad approaches which they call the study of 'social text' – the nature of everyday interaction in organizations and the study of 'social reality as discursively constructed and maintained' – 'the determination of social reality through ... discursive moves' (Alvesson and Kärreman 2000b, 1136). In this study, I adopt Rigg's (2003, 59) conceptual framework whereby "talk" is seen as essential to the everyday processes of organizing ... management is conceived as a discursive practice and ... learning is understood as an encounter with new discourse'. I propose here that the way in which subjects talk about themselves as leaders helps to constitute their identity in that role. One measure of success in a learning programme could therefore be to assess whether the discourses employed in the learning context have mediated this construction of self as a leader back in the workplace. As such, the study takes what Alvesson and Kärreman (2000a) term a 'micro-discourse approach' in that it examines the use of language in a specific social context.

This social view of language is influenced by Austin's (1962) work on 'speech acts' or 'performatives' which is underpinned by an assumption that by making an 'utterance', language users perform a social act. In this study, I was interested in the social functions of language as an indication of how management is enacted and how managers might see themselves differently as a result of experiencing a learning event. This latter idea is investigated by Rossiter (1994, 4) who describes what she terms Discursive Shift as 'A change in the language and practices which construct identity'. In the context of what Fairclough (1993, 138) points to as the 'order of discourses' which he defines as 'the totality of ... discursive practices and the relationships between them'. Here, I examine the relationship between the discursive practices of a management development programme and that deployed by managers when asked to describe their role and their leadership style. Turnbull (2002) deploys a similar framework in evaluating the shift in beliefs, attitudes, behaviours and emotions expressed as a result of managers attending a corporate change programme by thematically analyzing participants' accounts. In that study, Turnbull explains that efforts were made to use participants' own words as much as possible but that this was not always possible and that it was necessary 'to act as interpreter and to make linguistic choices to express ... participants' ... emotions' (Turnbull 2002, 27). The study set out to investigate how managers talked about themselves and their being-in-relation to others both before and after experiencing a learning event. It is concerned with how managers describe their practice and emphasizes the role of language as a mediator of managing and learning in the context of management as a social and relational activity.

From a traditional management research perspective, the analysis of texts may entail a process of coding and quantifying the number of times a word or phrase has been used by respondents in, for example, interviews (see Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Lowe 1997, 107). However, a grounded approach in which themes and patterns emerge from the data is more common. Once transcripts of the texts have been made, an analysis can be made of relatively short passages of speech, examining syntax and semantics in close detail or the analysis may entail the examination of large amounts of material, using a system of coding and classification (again, see Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Lowe 1997, 110–112, for an example) A simple, quantitative, content analysis approach may provide a useful starting point but simply counting the number of times that words or phrases appear assumes that their meaning is fixed

and takes no account of the social context in which they are spoken. A more qualitative, grounded theory approach has attractions for the researcher who wishes to use managers' language to uncover assumptions and dominant discourses.

In this study, a different approach was taken in that participants' own words were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively in an attempt to gauge changes in their attitudes to working in and leading a team. The research is grounded on the proposition that the way in which the management cadre (in this case, of one particular organization) talk about their role and their relationships with colleagues provides an indication of the values, attitudes and behaviours which MD interventions might seek to change.

Background to the study

This study entailed the evaluation of learning of a group of managers from a multinational IT services company attending a management development intervention, entitled *High Performing Teams*, a two day course which all employees at management level in the company were expected to attend. The event focused on the characteristics of successful teams and team leaders and was run in a conventional facilitative fashion, drawing on participants' experience as team leaders and managers. The purpose of the study was to examine if and how managers talked about themselves and their role differently as a result of attending the learning event and to measure the level (if any) of discursive shift which had taken place in these managers.

This study was carried out using a qualitative, case study approach which was informed by an initial quantitative analysis of spoken text data. The case used here constitutes the empirical evidence collected in the study rather than a description of an event or series of events which could be used as anecdotes or examples. The case study approach was deemed most suitable for the purpose of this study as it is useful in gaining an understanding of ambiguous phenomena (Gummesson 2008).

Eight managers were interviewed, using a semi-structured technique, over the telephone before the event. Seven of these managers were also interviewed 3–4 weeks after attendance on the programme. One respondent was not available for the second interview due to business and personal commitments. The roles carried out by the respondents were as follows:

- Two Systems Development Managers
- Three Project Managers
- An Engineering Manager
- A Technical Architect
- A Training and Development Manager

All of the managers in the study managed a group of between five and 16 people. All worked in geographically-dispersed teams. They had all attended the same *High Performing Teams* event and were asked to talk about their role as a team leader, what they enjoyed about teamwork and their views on the contribution of teams to business success. Questions were broadly similar pre and post event but post event interviews included questions about new ideas that they had gained from the programme.

Data analysis

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were analyzed in two ways; first through the use of a scalable and automatic corpus linguistics technique namely WMatrix software which allows a macroscopic analysis to inform the microscopic analysis as to which textual features should be investigated further (Rayson 2003, 2008). WMatrix is a data-driven technique based on natural language analysis which has tools trained on millions of words of naturally occurring data. The software enables the user to count and analyze words, phrases and concepts used in a particular text. Significant key words and concepts are compared against standard profiles from corpora of spoken English. Results are shown statistically as the deviation from the standard frequency (Rayson 2003)¹.

In the first stage of the study, words and phrases used by managers were analyzed using the corpus linguistics software which indicated which areas of text might warrant a subsequent, deeper analysis. A comparison was then made of managers' pre and post interview data to look for significant differences. Further data generated by a question about new ideas which participants had gained from the programme were also analyzed. The frequency list of words was used not as data in their final form, but constituted the basis of an investigation into the use of those words in context. So the initial, systematized analysis of data indicated specific elements of the interviews which warranted a more qualitative analysis.

The first level of analysis offered a comparison of key words used in the pre and post course data sets. Whilst some words like 'business', 'people' and the name of the company featured heavily and almost equally in both sets, the words 'customer' and 'organization' featured more significantly in the post course set. There was also an indication that in the post course interviews, respondents were using the word 'management' less and the word 'leadership' more.

The next level of analysis, at the concept level which grouped words and phrases in semantic fields, showed little difference between the pre and post course data sets. However, the 'new ideas' question from the post course data set showed key semantic fields as 'Belonging to a group', 'Participating', 'People', and 'Understanding'.

These data were subsequently interrogated using a concordance analysis on WMatrix which allows the user to examine the context in which phrases or words are being used. This gave an indication of the overall difference between pre and post course data and a further insight into the ways in which managers talked about the new ideas they had taken from the programme.

Findings from this first stage of analysis were that a second stage could be most effectively focused on the following areas:

- (1) How managers talked about their teams
- (2) How they described their approach to working with teams
- (3) Their understanding of leadership
- (4) The way in which they talked about customers

The second stage of analysis again considered all of the data rather than attempting to assess changes in individual managers. At this stage, text was extracted which dealt with the areas indicated as significant in stage one and this was examined in terms of both its content and tone. The findings are reported below under themes which emerged rather than as responses to particular questions.

The nature of teams and teamwork

The WMatrix analysis had already indicated that there was a definite shift in tone and emphasis in the way that the group expressed their thoughts about the role of teams within the organization. A further examination of the text revealed that pre-course, managers talked about the geographical location of their team, how reporting lines worked and how they gave guidance to teams. The tone of some respondents was, in parts, quite matter-of-fact and suggested a technician approach to management. The following quote is indicative of this in that the manager characterizes himself as remote, in more than geographical terms, from his team:

... I lead different teams – it is quite an unusual role at times ... but if they are having problems with part of the solution or they need help actually getting the solution to work and guidance over what their part of their solution is in the overall picture that is where ... my team leadership [comes in]

The nature of dispersed teamworking had implications for the way managers felt about their role and again, suggests a distanced, formal relationship:

We don't sit together; we are scattered all over the country; sometimes all over the globe but very very virtual ... it is not a case of I am their line manager I would say it is more informing them and telling them what we are trying to achieve and then helping them achieve it for the team

In the post-course interviews, there was evidence of a softer approach to the idea of what teams could offer to individuals and the organization. There was noticeable shift in the language used:

You know you are not isolated you have got the communication you have got the dialogue, the challenge of working with other people. Whereas if you didn't work within a team it would be pretty isolating really. You pick up ideas from other people, you learn from other people ... it is very rewarding

There was also evidence that managers were using new discursive resources as they talked about considering how team members might feel rather than considering the team as a means to an end:

I think being flexible, working together, feeling ownership. I think they have lacked ownership recently. People have become a bit divorced from it. Now I am seeing people pick up ownership again and wanting to get things working. Feeling like they make a difference ... it is good to see people getting on and begin to fix things

Managers' own approach to team leadership

The dispersed nature of team and the long-distance leadership which this engenders within the organization are predominant features of the pre-course data. The focus is upon task accomplishment with very little consideration of the relationships within the team which promote it:

... we get together on a monthly basis just for a face to face ... [there's] not a great deal of socializing going on

It is therefore no surprise that the language used to describe managers' own leadership role has a marked instrumental feel to it, portraying a

disengagement from the rest of the team and a focus on personal performance and metrics:

I am pushing my own agenda and pro-actively trying to add value to the business developing new offerings. Often they are being demanded of me and so the expectations I place on myself are often of my own doing so I am not sure that I can let myself off the hook quite so easily

The post-course data shows an acknowledgement of the benefits of teamworking in terms of increased creativity and co-production of knowledge:

Having other people to talk to, to bounce ideas off. To learn from their experiences and also they can learn off me.

There is also an indication that the value of strong interpersonal communication within a team has been emphasized and acknowledged:

Being able to listen to your team; being able to persuade them if that is what you feel needs to be done; being able to listen to what they are saying and ... to change what your thinking is.

The nature of leadership

In addition to talking about their own role as a team leader and how that affected their behaviour within and towards to the team, respondents also offered their views of leadership in a more generalized way. Before the course, some managers talked about leadership in transactional terms and conveyed a sense of disappointment in their team members:

I want them all to contribute and feel valued; what I won't do is put anybody down ... [But]I don't tolerate fools ... if they are constantly being negative or just don't want to do the job then you know I will move them on but I would rather have people ... who are more willing to do the job or willing to learn or at least showing effort

There was also evidence pre-course, that the leader's role was to assess, from a distance, how staff performed, rather than actively engaging them in tasks. One manager's concept of motivation exemplified this view:

Hopefully I am much more into carrot than stick motivation although I think ... I am aware I would like to reward my staff more however I sort of sit here hoping that they will deliver something brilliant to me but there has not been that much of [that]; our stuff ... hasn't ... really hit targets in that respect.

There was also some very tough language used here which underlines the absence of an awareness of a leadership style which deploys a relational approach to getting the best from people and the discursive resources used to describe it:

I have got one where he is working with another developer delivering through to me I really don't get very involved in that other than kick them into touch if things aren't going nicely or you know let my disappointment be known. I don't think I kick him very hard

Post-course, there was a softer and more considerate language used to describe leadership and the course would appear to have encouraged managers to look to others for examples of effective leadership:

(my current boss is) ... quite exceptional I think as a leader of a team and the thing I take from watching him is that he really does accept people for who they are and he tries to help them do their best and when they mess up he just helps them get out of the mess ... he never looks for people's weaknesses he is always trying to help them to do their best

One manager's summing up of his learning on the programme gave the following view of the nature of leadership:

(Leaders) need to have a kind of strategic view so that they can see how their efforts fit into the wider context and when I say their efforts I mean the team's effort ... They need to be self aware ... and they need to be able to see to the heart of people to understand ... what people's competencies are ... but then also what a person's motivations are ... If they can do all of those things ... they should be able to bring it all together to lead and deliver

Another commented upon how he felt team members should be treated:

It is about treating them with the respect they deserve ... the knowledge they have got and what we are getting out of them

Attitudes to customers

The WMatrix analysis showed a quantitative increase in references to customers in the post-course data compared to pre-course. Two examples from the post-course data set are given below. These indicate that managers were using new discursive practices to describe the impact of effective teamwork on customers:

... We have got a massively changing organization and you can't stick to the rules you know rules are there as guidelines ... we all have to remember that we are here to support our customers and it is very easy for people to forget that

... Well good teams will always deliver on time or before time ... they will always question what they are doing most of the time. In other words they are always looking, each individual member, team leaders ... they are looking to make what they do much better in terms of service to their customers and so that could be internal or external customers ... To make sure all the individual bits need do what they need to do to deliver what the customer needs

Conclusions

Even though this was a relatively small study, it is possible to see how changes in language use are an indicator of shifts in attitudes and behaviours which occurred as a result of attending a learning programme. It is reasonable to conclude that managers who attended this course adopted new discursive practices, acquired on the course, to talk about the nature of teamwork itself and particularly of how shared understandings, dialogue and ownership contribute to effective practice. There is also evidence of a discursive shift between pre and post-course data which illustrates a softer, more people-centred approach to team leadership. The references

to the team's impact on the customer increased after managers had attended the programme and an examination of transcripts showed that there was a greater awareness of the role of effective teamwork in delivering on and exceeding customer expectations. The manner in which respondents talked about leadership also changed from them referring to 'not tolerating fools' and 'kicking into touch' to a more humanist approach of accepting people for who they are and helping team members to understand strengths and weaknesses and treating them with respect.

It is important to note that these discursive shifts were observed across the group as a whole and that no attempt was made to determine individual changes in the eight respondents. Traditional approaches to evaluation take no account of the emergent nature of learning or of the potential impact of an evaluation on the learning process itself or of the relational nature of managerial practice. The approach taken in this study characterizes the learning event and the evaluation process as interventions which have the capacity to help them shape their identity as team leaders, evidenced by discursive shift. As Somers (1994, 606) suggests: 'It is through narrativity, that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world and it is through narratives that we constitute our social identities'.

In this subtle reinvention of this group of managers there also exists the possibility for organizational change, based on a new way of speaking about roles and relationships and the organization itself. The idea that language can be examined to uncover organizational identity claims is not new (Ran and Duimering 2007). 'Reaction' data from traditional evaluations would not offer such opportunities as they do not always illustrate the subtle, attitudinal changes which are a part of MD and that we should seek to capture. Even at the level of 'job behaviour', evaluation practice often concentrates on measuring competences which normally do not encompass a measure of such subtleties. As Devins and Gold (2002, 116) point out, 'there is a need to move away from an (evaluation) approach based on positivist, largely economic principles'. They cite Guba and Lincoln's (1989, 8) conception of evaluation which is particularly useful here:

Evaluation outcomes are not descriptions of 'the way things really are' or 'really work' or of some 'true' state of affairs, but instead represent meaningful constructions that individual actors or groups of actors form to 'make sense' of the situations they find themselves in

I have presented here an illustration of how an examination of language can provide *indicators* of behavioural and attitudinal change in managers. This proposed approach to evaluation goes some way to addressing the criticism that chain reaction models play down the relevance of the social and contextual nature of management and pay little attention to the significance of language in a manager's role. It also suggests a shift in the evaluator's intent from proving that a programme has 'worked' to one of adding to the learning process especially in recognizing emergent learning. Although not the case in this study, there would be a potential benefit in feeding back the results to learners as a means of making managers more aware of their language use in order to improve managerial practice: Shotter and Cunliffe (2003) believe that managers who understand the social constructionist nature of their *meaning-making* actions are likely to be more aware of ethical and moral considerations.

It is important to consider that the discourse reported in this study deals only with local phenomena – the socially constructed reality of the interviewees. This is not an attempt to study leadership or leadership development *per se*. Whilst there was a deliberate attempt to keep the language used by the interviewer concise and

simple, the fact that they were carried out by an interviewer from a business school may well have had an impact on the subjects' responses; perhaps in encouraging them to 'try out' the new discursive practices learned on the programme. So the link between discursive shift and a sustained change in practice may be difficult to make without more research and there is potential here for a further, longitudinal study. However, it gives a significant clue that these learners may have been constituting themselves as leaders in a different way – enabled by a new vocabulary – and that these newly acquired discursive resources are mediators of learning and change.

Kirkpatrick (1959a, 1959b, 1960a, 1960b) and others, recommending evaluation in an essentially technical and systematized manner which unpicks the various threads of learning to assess how they came to be, offer too simple a proposition but one which nevertheless has an alluring veneer of science. Evaluation has been typified as an exercise in proving or disproving that something worked rather than providing the basis for further learning and of a dynamic approach to programme development. There is also an argument here for focusing on the relational aspects of a manager's role in the evaluation process. This paper has provided an insight into how we might transform this organizational practice by suggesting how it could be re-conceptualized.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Allan Macpherson for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper and to UFHRD for the research honorarium which helped to fund the study.

Note

1. Further information about WMatrix, including screenshots of the types of data generated can be accessed at <http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/wmatrix/>

References

- Alvesson, M., and D. Kärreman. 2000a. Taking the linguistic turn in organizational research: challenges, responses, consequences. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 16: 136–58.
- Alvesson, M., and D. Kärreman. 2000b. Varieties of discourse: on the study of organizations through discourse analysis. *Human Relations* 53, no. 9: 1125–49.
- Austin, J.L. 1962. *How to do things with words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bates, R. 2004. A critical analysis of evaluation practice: the Kirkpatrick model and the principle of beneficence. *Evaluation and Program Planning* 27: 341–7.
- Blanchard, P.N., and J.W. Thacker. 1999. *Effective training systems, strategies and practice*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Blanchard, P.N., J.W. Thacker, and S.A. Way. 2000. Training evaluation: perspectives and evidence from Canada. *International Journal of Training and Development* 4, no. 4: 295–304.
- Brinkerhoff, R.O. 1988. An integrated model for HRD. *Training and Development Journal* February: 66–8.
- Buckley, R., and J. Caple. 1990. *The theory and practice of training*. London: Kogan Page.
- Cunliffe, A. 2002. Reflexive dialogical practice in management learning. *Management Learning* 33, no. 1: 35–61.
- Easterby-Smith, M. 1994. *Evaluating management development, training and education*. Aldershot: Gower.
- Easterby-Smith, M., R. Thorpe, and A. Lowe. 1997. *Management research. An introduction*. London: Sage.
- Devins, D., and J. Gold. 2002. Social constructionism: a theoretical framework to underpin support for the development of managers in SME's. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development* 9, no. 2: 111–9.
- Fairclough, N. 1993. Critical discourse analysis and the marketization of public discourse: the universities. *Discourse and Society* 4, no. 2: 133–68.

- Fayol, H. 1949. *General and industrial management*. Pitman: London.
- Freire, P. 1972. *The pedagogy of the oppressed*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Gergen, K. 1999. *An invitation to social construction*. London: Sage.
- Grant, D., T. Keenoy, and C. Osrick. 1998. Organizational discourse: of diversity, dichotomy and multi-disciplinarity. In *Discourse and organization*, ed. D. Grant, T. Keenoy, and C. Osrick. London: Sage.
- Grint, K. 1997. *Fuzzy management. Contemporary ideas and practices at work*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Guba, E.G., and Y. Lincoln. 1989. *Fourth generation evaluation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Gummesson, E. 2008. Case study. In *The Sage dictionary of qualitative management research*, ed. R. Thorpe and R. Holt. London: Sage.
- Hamblin, A.C. 1974. *Evaluation and control of training*. Maidenhead: McGraw Hill.
- Harrison, R. 2000. *Learning and development*. London: CIPD.
- Holton, E.F. 1996. The flawed four-level evaluation model. *Human Resource Development Quarterly* 7, no. 1: 5–21.
- Huczynski, A.A., and J.W. Lewis. 1980. An empirical study into the learning transfer process in management training. *Journal of Management Studies* May: 227–40.
- Kirkpatrick, D.L. 1959a. Techniques for evaluating programs. *Journal of the American Society of Training Directors (ASTD)* 13, no. 11: 3–9.
- Kirkpatrick, D.L. 1959b. Techniques for evaluating programs: Part 2 – Learning. *Journal of ASTD* 13, no. 12: 21–6.
- Kirkpatrick, D.L. 1960a. Techniques for evaluating programs: Part 3 – Behavior. *Journal of ASTD* 14, no. 1: 13–8.
- Kirkpatrick, D.L. 1960b. Techniques for evaluating programs: Part 4 – Results. *Journal of ASTD* 14, no. 2: 28–32.
- Lewis, P., and Thornhill. A. 1994. The evaluation of training: an organizational culture approach. *Journal of European Industrial Training* 18, no. 8: 25–32.
- Mintzberg, H. 1994. The fall and rise of strategic planning. *Harvard Business Review* 72, no. 1: 107–14.
- Pavlica, K., D. Holman, and R. Thorpe. 1997. Rethinking Kolb's theory of experiential learning in management education. *Management Learning* 28, no. 2: 135–48.
- Ran, B., and R. Duimering. 2007. Imaging the organization: language use in organizational identity claims. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 21: 155–87.
- Rayson, P. 2003. WMatrix: a statistical method and software tool for linguistic analysis through corpus comparison. *Ph.D. thesis*, Lancaster University.
- Rayson, P. 2008. Wmatrix: a web-based corpus processing environment, Computing Department, Lancaster University. <http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/wmatrix/>
- Reed, M. 1989. *The sociology of management*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Rigg, C. 2003. It's in the way they talk: a discourse analysis of managing in two small businesses. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research* 11, no. 1: 58–75.
- Rossiter, A. 1994. Chips, coke and rock-'n'-roll; children's mediation of an invitation to a first dance party. *Feminist Review* 46: 1–20.
- Shotter, J. 1993. *Conversational realities: constructing life through language*. London: Sage.
- Shotter, J., and A. Cunliffe. 2003. Managers as practical authors: everyday conversations for action. In *Management and language*, ed. D. Holman and R. Thorpe. London: Sage.
- Somers, M.R. 1994. The narrative constitution of identity: a relational and network approach' *Theory and Society* 23: 605–49.
- Stewart, J. 1999. *Employee development practice*. London: Financial Times, Pitman.
- Taylor, F.W. 1947. *Scientific management*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Turnbull, S. 2002. The planned and unintended emotions generated by a corporate change programme. *Advances in Developing Human Resources* 4, no. 1: 22–38.
- Warr, P. 1969. Evaluating management training. *Journal of the Institute of Personnel Management* February.
- Warr, P., M. Bird, and N. Rackham. 1970. *Evaluation of management training*. Epping: Gower Press.
- Whitelaw, M. 1972. *The evaluation of management training – a review*. London: IPM.
- Winterton, J., and R. Winterton. 1997. Does management development add value? *British Journal of Management* 18: s65–s76.

Copyright of Human Resource Development International is the property of Routledge and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.