

Leading the Future of the Public Sector: The Third Transatlantic Dialogue
University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware, USA

May 31–June 2, 2007

Workshop 3: Training and Developing Leaders

Evaluation of Leadership Development and Training in the British Senior Civil Service: the Search for the Holy Grail

Dr Sylvia Horton

University of Portsmouth

England

Sylvia.Horton@port.ac.uk
00 44 2392 613729

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the ways in which training interventions are being used to develop leadership in the British Senior Civil Service (SCS) and how their effectiveness is currently being evaluated. First it describes the three leadership programmes designed and delivered by the National School of Government to develop leadership skills and competencies within the SCS. Second, it explores the literature on evaluation of training and identifies some key models that are influencing current practices in both private and public organisations. Third, it identifies the ways in which the leadership programmes are currently being evaluated and which of the evaluation models found in the literature are either explicitly or implicitly being used. Finally it considers the problems of evaluating training and how to ensure that there is a return even if it can't be measured.

Evaluation of Leadership Development and Training in the British Senior Civil Service: the search for the Holy Grail?

Evaluation is the assessment of the total value of a training system, training course or programme in social as well as financial terms. Evaluation differs from validation in that it attempts to measure the overall cost-benefit of the course or programme and not just the achievement of its laid down objectives. (Manpower Services Commission 1981)

Introduction

The British Senior Civil Service (SCS), created in 1996, consists of circa 3,800 specialist and generalist managers filling the top three levels of the service. They head government departments and agencies and are responsible for advising governments on policy, implementing policy and managing the performance of central government organisations involved in the delivery of government services. Most are career civil servants but around 20 per cent are recruited externally. Managing and leading this complex organisation (some 150 administrative units and circa 590,000 civil servants) makes great demands on these senior officials.

The SCS is in the vanguard of the transformation of the state, which has been in process since the 1980s. Traditionally leaders emerged in the civil service largely through internal talent spotting and planned experience. Although merit was always a key factor in promotion to senior posts, seniority was equally important. The idea of leadership training and development can be traced back to the 1980s when major reforms began. Influenced by the Management Charter Initiative and its National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) framework for managers, and working with outside consultants, Price Waterhouse, the new Civil Service College (CSC) developed a competency-based training programme for the top seven grades of the service. All courses were linked to core competencies, which were a combination of job, role and personal criteria. The courses were evaluated almost entirely by simple feedback questionnaires designed by the trainers for the trainers.

The *Report on Civil Service Reform* in 1999 (Cabinet Office 1999b) projected major changes in the culture of the service and placed great emphasis on the need for leadership to carry through the reform programme. The key themes in the report were: improved leadership, effective delivery, greater creativity and innovation, promotion of diversity, working in partnership and encouraging the use of new technology. A new mission statement, *Vision and Values*, which reflected these themes, was published and a revised competency framework and pay and performance management system for the SCS were commissioned (Horton 2001). The resulting competency framework called *Giving Purpose and Direction* had six competencies all emphasising the leadership role:

- Making a personal impact
- Thinking strategically
- Getting the best from people

- Learning and improving
- Focusing on delivery

Each of the competencies was accompanied by a list of effective and ineffective behaviours, which became the criteria used in assessing performance and identifying where leadership development was required (Horton 2006). The CSC created a range of courses to support the new framework and develop the necessary skills.

In 2005 a National School of Government (NSG) replaced the CSC and is now responsible for developing, delivering and evaluating the leadership development programmes. It has a Centre for Strategic Leadership, which is designed to ‘drive forward strategic change across the public service and beyond’ (NSG 2007). The Centre is staffed by academics, trainers and civil servants on secondment but calls upon outside experts including members of the SCS to deliver its courses. The latter are shaped by the Cabinet Office and an advisory group of permanent secretaries whose focus is on meeting the corporate and strategic needs of the Civil Service. One of its priorities is the creation of a corporate identity amongst its top leaders.

The emphasis of the Government is now on delivery and this is resulting in a major shift in the core purpose of leadership within the civil service. Top civil servants are seen as chief executives who are primarily strategists and leaders. They are expected to be innovators, customer oriented, and skilful in performance and risk management. The new profile also emphasises visible leaders who can inspire trust, take personal responsibility for delivering results and work in joined up government teams and partnerships. They must be focused on strategic outcomes and quick to respond to environmental changes.

The Leadership Development Programme

There are currently three levels in the leadership programme for the SCS, delivered by the NSG. The first is a foundation programme called *Corporate Leadership First*. This is designed for SCS in pay band 1 who have had only one year’s experience. It involves personal profiling, explores leadership models, practices, tools and techniques and strategic thinking. It also considers contemporary dilemmas and challenges. The course is mandatory and there are around seven held each year. The cost for the five-day programme was circa £9000 but from 2007 that has been reduced to £3,500.

The second level course is the *Advanced Leadership Programme (ALP)*. This is aimed at SCS with at least two years experience in their grade. It is intended to reinforce the development of a collective leadership cadre at the top of the civil service while enabling individuals to maximise their personal impact and personal effectiveness in a delivery focused environment. Four key themes run throughout the programme- self-awareness, leaders and their teams, service delivery from the citizen’s point of view and reflection and looking to the future. There are four modules each lasting three or four days and taken over 12 to 15 months. This is also a mandatory programme introduced in 2006. There are 20 people in each cohort and circa five cohorts year. The cost for each participant is £13,000.

The third level course, the *Top Management Programme*, has been running since the 1980s. It is designed for SCS at director level (in the second pay band) with the potential to rise further but also top executives from both inside and outside the public sector. Its aims are to deepen personal awareness of their effectiveness as leaders, extend their strategic, change and risk capabilities and broaden their environmental awareness to assist in planning for the future. It is also designed to build participants' resilience and ability to deal with crises and enhance their strategic communication skills under pressure. It currently lasts for 10 days and costs £14,500.

A new one-day event *The Leadership Pad* was introduced in 2007 and is available at no charge to participants or their departments. It is designed to bring together new recruits to the SCS (internal and external) for a shared corporate induction programme and will form the first step in creating a corps of top managers and leaders with a sense of corporate identity

A further suite of new programmes was also introduced in 2007. *The Modern Leaders Programme* is open to SCS Pay Band I and their equivalent across the wider public, third and private sectors. This is also aimed at developing collaborative leadership practices and the ability to lead across organisational boundaries for improved delivery. A *Leading Change* programme, designed for the same level of the SCS, will help develop change leadership skills. Finally a series of *Leadership Development Workshops* are also available (NSG 2007).

Evaluation of training- theories and practice

The high cost of training today and the mandatory nature of the leadership development programmes in the SCS has led the NSG to investigate the evaluation of its training interventions and to seek to develop more effective tools to demonstrate their value and the rate of return on the investment (ROI) made by departments and agencies. It is also intended to demonstrate the competitive advantage of the NSG itself over alternative trainers or strategies for developing leadership.

This search for a way of calculating the real value and worth of training and human resource development has been likened to the search for the 'holy grail'. One author suggests the holy grail of evaluation is how to find the way of putting a 'financial' value on training that has been carried out' (Critten 1993:158). This, however, is a narrow economic view of the purpose of evaluation as the financial dimension is only one aspect of the value or 'worth' of leadership training and can only encompass what can be quantified. A more generic concept of the holy grail of evaluation is how to find the total 'value' and 'worth' of training and development to all stakeholders who have an 'interest' in the activities and the outputs of the organisation. This involves the contribution of the training to the achievement of the organisation's goals and objectives, the impact it has on the morale and commitment of the staff and the long term effect of the learning on the organisation's ability to cope within a dynamic and fast changing environment.

There are essentially two schools of thought about approaches to training evaluation, one believes in scientific, quantitative and conclusive analysis; the other believes in the value of subjective, qualitative and action-oriented exploration. The former support the search for the

holy grail of ROI or rate of return on investment. The latter school want to improve the transfer of learning and are interested in identifying evidence of ongoing learning impact or ROL.

Many theories and models of evaluation have been developed since the 1960s. Within these some make a distinction between validation and evaluation. Validation is measuring whether the training has delivered what it promised while evaluation is making a judgement about the effect of the training in practice and whether the objectives of the training were the right ones in the first place (Critten 1991). A further distinction is sometimes made between 'formative' and 'summative' evaluation (Easterby Smith 1986). Formative evaluation is indicative of what has been learned but summative evaluation is about whether and how it has been applied.

The earliest theories were based upon scientific principles of observation and measurement and sought to identify cause and effect. In particular they wanted to establish the financial value of the training by examining 'costs' and 'benefits' (Bramley 1991). This hard accounting approach was soon challenged by a more pragmatic, soft approach which sought to measured the 'value' of training by identifying the indirect and immeasurable effects such as on morale and group dynamics which they thought could not be quantified (Fielder and Pearson 1979; Bramley 1991).

In the 1960s and 1970s the emphasis turned to goal directed training. It was argued that by setting clear goals and objectives and terminal behaviour this would aid evaluation (Mager 1962). This attracted the criticism that the goals set were usually those of the trainers. Thus the achievement of training goals may not represent the outcomes of the training for either the trainees, their managers or the organisation.

A further advancement came with the concept of the training cycle that involves identifying training needs, or the *training gap*, choosing the appropriate training intervention, implementing it and evaluating the results of the training against the original *training needs*. This also came in for criticism because of its internal focus on both the training process and its evaluation and in particular the passive role of participants.

Kirkpatrick (1967) made a major breakthrough with the idea of levels or steps of evaluation-reaction, learning, behaviour and results. Warr *et al* (1970) built upon Kirkpatrick' model identifying seven levels of, which included context, input, reactions, outcomes (CIRO) but also three levels of outcomes which they referred to as ultimate, intermediate and immediate. Hamblin (1974) put these levels of evaluation together in a cause and effect chain linking levels of training effects and also added a fifth level of ultimate value. He argued that training leads to reactions that lead to learning, which leads to changes in the organisation, that lead to changes in achievement of its ultimate goals and to added value to the organisation. He recognised that the chain can be broken at any one of its links and the task of evaluation was to discover whether all the links have held together and if not which links had snapped and for what reason. Hamblin's other contribution to evaluation theory, however, was his recognition that external factors affect the results of training that is not a closed system. He opened the way to a more imaginative approach to appraisal.

Developments in evaluation theory in the 1980s and 1990s laid much more emphasis on the unanticipated outcomes of training, the immeasurable outcomes and most important the actual output of training, that is what *has* been achieved rather than what *has not* been achieved. Critten argues that evaluation is a dynamic process that generates value in its own right and requires the use of a variety of approaches to arrive at useful data. The description of a training programme has no value in itself but only to the stakeholders and its ultimate value requires ‘reflection in action’ on the part of each stakeholder based on the information with which he/she is confronted. The ultimate value of training to an organisation is when all the stakeholders reflect on this information together and arrive at a consensus of value (Critten 1993).

Critten advocates a model in which evaluation works as an accumulator within a learning organisation where everyone, including the chief executive is a learner, everyone acts as a resource to each other, everyone has their own development log, what they want to achieve and the resources they need to achieve it and where every manager in the organisation sees their role as increasing the value of their staff. There are six stages in his evaluation model, which are:

1. Contracting- identifying the goals of the organisation, the vision, skills and competencies required and the resources needed. Each manager then carries out the same process with his/her team.
2. Description: each individual member of staff will identify their own learning needs and formulate a development log. Critten calls this ‘first order reflection’
3. Focusing: the individual will focus on what learning is required
4. Confronting: acting out the learning
5. Consolidation: this is where the effects of the learning are assessed in terms of value added to the organisation
6. Dissemination: this involves communicating to all those involved in the organisation what objectives have been achieved, what resources have been used; at what cost. It should also identify unanticipated goals that were achieved. This position then becomes the basis for the next stage of the learning process.

All these models, or heuristic devices, have been developed to advance evaluation but they are not without their critics. Kirkpatrick’s model has probably received the most criticism. The main criticism is that the model is not well grounded in research but is a prescriptive model (Holton and Naquin 2005). Further, it represents a trainer’s notion of what constitutes effective evaluation not a business manager’s (Twitchell et al 2000). As with all stagist models there is an assumption of linearity and that the first stage causes the second and so on. Thus evaluation starts after the training has been done or during the training and not before (Kearns 2005). Holton (1996) argues the model is fundamentally flawed and incomplete because it takes no account of the many contextual factors that may affect the transfer of learning, including the ability and motivation of the trainee, the relevance of the training to the needs of the trainee and the organisation, and the receptiveness of the workplace organisation to the transfer of the learning. A concise summary of the limitations of the Kirkpatrick model is provided by Russ-Eft and Preskill (2001) ‘The taxonomy’s lack of diagnostic capability and its reliability to account for factors that affect the outcomes at each level are just two of its inherent weaknesses. Taxonomies merely describe anticipated training outcomes. They fail to offer any direction on

what critical variables need to be studied or how to conduct a rigorous, useful evaluation in dynamic, evolving and political environments’.

Yet while the model may be flawed it is still very widely known and used. An analysis of the American Association of Training and Development (ASTD) reports from 1999 to 2003 indicated that on average 79% of companies evaluate programmes at Level 1, 36% at level 2 but only 15% at level 3 and 8 % at level 4 (Sugrue et al 2004). The model is also widely used in the UK but as in the US most organisations use it to evaluate at levels 1 and 2 and only about one third (36%) of UK organisations seek to capture the effects of learning on the bottom line (CIPD 2006)

The most recent thinking about evaluation has made some considerable progress in developing a more sophisticated approach. Holton’s model called the Evaluation Research Measurement Model, concentrates on those individual and environmental factors that are mediating variables in the transfer of learning. Holton with others (Holton *et al* 2000) has developed a learning transfer system inventory (LTSI), which concentrates on factors that influence the transfer of learning to the workplace. These include:

- The ability to use the newly acquired knowledge and expertise
- The motivation to use them
- The receptiveness and support of the organisation
- The personal characteristics of the trainee.

Holton’s questionnaire has been used to assess the quality and receptiveness of the transfer climate and to identify changes needed to facilitate the transfer of learning and the effective use of training (Donovan et al 2001). An indirect effect of using the LTSI appears to be assisting in creating an organisational culture that is receptive to learning.

Another contribution to current thinking about evaluation is the work of Rae (2002) She has focused specifically on why organisations fail to undertake extensive evaluations and suggests it is the lack of training of managers in the best position to evaluate the training. She identifies these as the training evaluation quintet: senior management, the trainer, line management, the training manager and the trainee and prescribes their respective roles.

Finally Kearns (2005: 37-38) argues that none of the traditional models or taxonomies have got it right: because academic models are not based on the real world and practitioner models start from the wrong place. Evaluation he argues ‘is not an attempt to prove that training is working....it is an integral part of the way individuals and organisations learn to improve. The purpose of evaluation is to help individuals to learn how to improve the effectiveness of their organisation’. Kearns ‘base line model’ differentiates evaluation from validation. The first step is to establish how the proposed training will add value to the organisation and meet its needs. This involves identifying and prioritising business needs, identifying what skills /competencies trainees’ need and designing the learning solution to fill the skills and knowledge gaps in relation to the business objectives. The second step is to deliver the training intervention; assess that people have learnt what they were intended to; and then reinforce the learning through the sponsor or the line manager. The sponsor must be involved in all previous phases and ensure that the expectations of all others who are stakeholders in the training intervention are effectively

managed. The final step involves validating the transfer of learning and evaluating the effect. Kearns uses the simple formula of ROI to do this, which is

$$\text{Net ROI} = \frac{\text{gross benefit from training} - \text{cost of training}}{\text{Cost of training}} \times 100$$

It is obvious that the cost of training is the easiest to calculate. The gross benefit to training is easy when there is a specific objective, which can be quantified as for example an increase in sales or delivery of units of service although even here it may not be possible to link the training directly to the change in output. It becomes increasingly difficult when you cannot quantify the organisational outputs, although Kearns thinks everything can have a £ sign attached. But even if you cannot measure it Kearns argues it is still worth doing because ROI has a number of functions, not the least of which it is as a management tool (Kearns 2005:122).

The purpose of examining these theories is that first it demonstrates a large body of knowledge exists about evaluation, which is continually evolving. Second, it offers a rich source of ideas about how to evaluate at different levels and amongst different stakeholders and what are the difficulties in doing so. Third, some of these theories have influenced the approach to evaluation of the top leadership programmes within the British SCS, which we will now review.

Evaluation strategy of the SCS in the UK

The NSG has based the evaluation of its leadership programmes largely on the Kirkpatrick model blended with some of the ideas of Hamblin, Rae and Kearns.

The Top Management Programme

Of the three programmes currently being delivered the Top Management Programme has been running for the longest period of time. The reaction of participants has always been evaluated by means of feedback questionnaires, which have been responded to in terms of adjustments to the programme. The current programme, however, is now evaluated in a more comprehensive way.

Before the programme begins participants receive a document that outlines its content and lists its five objectives that are to:

- Develop higher level leadership skills
- Strengthen skills in managing people and organisations
- Enhance understanding of other environments
- Create networks
- Experiment and have fun.

The objectives are clearly linked to the organisational objectives set down in the government policy for reforming the civil service and have informed the planning of the programme. Participants are invited to assess the relevance of these objectives to them as individuals and to their organisations. Six months after completion of the programme participants have another opportunity to re-evaluate the impact on them of the training received.

Participants are also invited to identify their own personal objectives and what they think their team and the wider organisation want to get out of the training. This should be done before they arrive but the programme offers participants assistance in doing this either before or during the course.

The methods of delivery are explained to all participants in advance and the teaching methods are consciously varied to ensure the most appropriate method for each session. These include expert-led sessions, visiting speakers, live case studies and a wide range of participative activities. Great emphasis is placed on leadership development groups, action learning sets, coaching and networks. These provide many opportunities for participants to challenge existing ideas, go beyond their comfort zones, obtain access to new research and good practice and to experiment, be innovative, reflect and think. Participants are encouraged to record their thoughts and ideas systematically throughout the programme to improve their recall when they are completing their feedback questionnaires but more importantly to assist them in drawing up an action plan.

The action plan is a means of formalising the intended transfer of the learning into the participant's organisation. It registers that learning has taken place and the way the learning will be transformed into changed behaviour. The action plan will be shared with line managers.

In summary, the range of methods used to assist with evaluation and validation of TMP are:

- Establish goals in relation to organisational HR objectives
- Establishing individual goals and organisational goals as well as programme goals (element of Kern's base line) goals
- Inviting opinions on the programme informally, during sessions and in 'set aside' programme review periods (Kirkpatrick's reaction level).
- Completing an evaluation form on each session, module and the programme overall (Kirkpatrick's reaction level).
- Drawing up an action plan (Kirkpatrick's learning level)
- Re-assessing the impact of the programme on their way of working at a reunion six months after completion of the programme (Kirkpatrick's behaviour level).

The feedback provided by participants is an important part of the information taken into account by the programme director in making decisions about the continuing evolution of TMP. The feedback is, however, only part of the jigsaw. Other major influences include changes and initiatives within the external environment in which the public sector operates. For example, there is now a much stronger emphasis than in the past on delivery of services from the citizen's perspective. This has involved, among other things, including live case study group work in the health, law and order and community development sectors.

Individual participants draw up their own personal development plans and leadership manifestos based on experience on the programme and reflection on what changes they wish to make to personal skills, behaviours and values and on the impact they wish to make at a team or organisational level. Individuals are encouraged to share the plans with line managers and/or sponsors on return to the workplace. Participants are also encouraged to discuss and share progress on putting those plans and changes into practice when the programme re-assembles 6 months after its completion. However, there is no formal audit or evaluation of the impact of the programme after its completion.

The Advanced Leadership Programme

This programme, designed for SCS at Deputy Director level, was redesigned in 2006. It is a costly programme for departments as in addition to fees it takes staff away from their job for 15 days over a 15-month period. All participants must have department support.

As with the TMP participants receive information about the programme in advance and are asked to identify what their own objectives are as well as those of their organisation. The course aims and objectives are identified in a very comprehensive way. They are to:

- Enable course members to become more self aware and reflective and gain a better insight into the priorities and approaches of other people.
- Acquire the tools, techniques and behaviours that will enable them to increase their impact and effectiveness as a leader
- Build networks of peers, which will provide a continuous source of support both during and after the programme.
- Enable participants to form and lead high performance teams by supporting and embedding creativity and innovation. (They will be shown how to work effectively with colleagues across professional and organisational boundaries and make an impact on strategic and personnel challenges).
- Enable members to find out how service delivery is perceived from the citizens point of view by undertaking a stretch project designed to enable members to understand the change process and how leadership and culture impact on change and how the development of a strategy is linked to its delivery.
- Enable members to reflect and look to the future.

The teaching and learning strategies are very similar to the TMP and include class instruction, interactive group work, action learning sets, case studies, tutoring by subject experts and individual reflection.

There are regular and frequent opportunities for informal feedback throughout the programme and a questionnaire is distributed at the end of each module consisting of questions relating to its aims and objectives, the delivery of specific units and general hygiene factors. A questionnaire was designed specifically for the new programme and was modified after the first module in the light of the experience and feedback from the participants and the trainers.

Again like the TPM each participant draws up an action plan but also joins a support group, which meets regularly between the modules to give support to each member in the implementation of their respective action plans. Six months after the end of the programme participants will be invited back to the NSG to reflect on the programme and to analyse the impact at an individual, team and organisational level. At this point in time no reunion has taken place

Sponsoring organisations are recommended to undertake a 360-degree appraisal for each participant but again as yet there is no feedback to report on. The plan is also to interview again 12 months after completion of the programme although the format of this is not yet clear.

Corporate Leadership First Programme

The third leadership development programme, a mandatory course for new members of the SCS, replaces the former SCS Foundation Programme, which was run for several years. It lasts five days and similar to the other two programmes above the programme team identify the aims and objectives, design the content, invite participants to reflect, at the beginning of the course, upon what they hope to get from the programme and what their organisations expect. The programme director is responsible for ensuring that there is informal feedback and that all participants complete the formal evaluation questionnaire. This is accompanied by a report of the trainers' evaluation of the programme and where they think changes are called for, if any.

All participants are informed in advance of the aims and objectives of the course and the teaching methods used. These are to:

- Enhance (participants) personal development as leaders thereby contributing to the collective leadership capability of the organisation
- Set their new roles and responsibilities in a corporate context, aligning their objectives with the strategic direction of the employing organisation
- Reflect on the essential ingredients of leadership
- Evaluate and enhance their own approaches to leadership and begin the process of becoming the leader they want to be
- Develop a foundation for their continuing personal and career development.

Unlike the other programmes this new foundation course states specifically what are the seven intended learning outcomes for the participants and the benefits of the programme to their organisations (NSG 2007). These provide clearer criteria for validating the success of the programme although this has not yet been done.

In all the feedback questionnaires, in the three programmes, the target set is a 92% very satisfied or satisfied response rate. A comparison of the feedback of the last three Foundation courses (which the author had access to) demonstrated that that was not always achieved. Over the three year period there was an improvement in all six key questions relating to aims and objectives although the response to 'how well were your learning goals met?' still fell short (at 89.3%) of the target in 2006. In the two previous programmes responses were significantly below the target and the programme team responded with changes of staff, content and teaching methods.

The new Advanced Leadership Programme has been designed to reflect a number of influences including perceptions from previous participants. All participants as stated above now have to identify their learning needs before coming on the programme and are asked to agree their learning objectives with their line managers. Individuals can validate/challenge those learning objectives while on the course with programme staff, peers or facilitators and these changes demonstrate that learning that has taken place albeit by the trainers.

Evaluating the Evaluation Strategy

Evaluation is, as we have seen, different from validation. It is quite clear that the NSG is doing a lot of validation. It is collecting data on the reactions of trainees to the specific units of training, the quality of the trainers and the overall programme and the hygiene factors. It requires all participants to state, in addition to whether they think the aims and objectives set for the programme have been achieved; whether their own expectations have been met and whether what they have learnt from the training experience is useful. Participants also draw up action plans, which are the basis for the Kirkpatrick's third level of evaluation – namely the evidence of transferred learning. The latter, however, is an innovation in the new Advanced Leadership Programme and when this data on outcomes is available it will provide the basis on which to make a judgement about the value of the training. More detailed research into whether these plans have been acted upon or not and if so how successfully will be required. There are no plans at present to go beyond stage three to Kirkpatrick's stage four. To date the evidence is that the NSG is learning from the feedback and is applying that learning in continually updating its programmes and ensuring that the aims and objectives are in tune with the aims and objectives of the SCS and the participants on their courses.

Although there are financial accounts of the input costs to the NSG of providing these programmes there does not appear to be any calculation of total input costs to the participants' department /agency. This would require a calculation, in addition to the cost of the training programme, of the salary of the participant and any costs involved in covering his/her work during their absence. It is not impossible to calculate those costs in financial terms, which would demonstrate the total cost of training to the government but it would not enable an assessment of whether there was a good rate of return on that investment. The calculation of the benefits and the total return on the investment is far more problematic and at the moment is not being attempted.

Where a trainee has a revenue-generating role then it may be possible to calculate a direct link between training and an increase in revenue. However, senior civil servants are rarely engaged directly and operationally in revenue generating roles even in departments such as revenue and customs. The majority of government departments and agencies are responsible for delivering programmes rather than raising revenue and often through other organisations or in partnership with private or voluntary bodies. Therefore it is not possible to adopt the Kearns ROI formula in a mechanistic and scientific way. It is especially difficult to calculate the contribution of leadership training even though it may be possible to assess the effect of the training on the responses of those affected by the leadership style and skills.

In the recent Capability Studies undertaken in government departments a series of questions on leadership are being used to test leadership capability and these are proving useful in establishing the current capability or shortfall and therefore constitute a base line from which a notional target for improvement could be set. Post training evaluation using the same questions could indicate what 'improvement' had been achieved. This may well be on the government agenda already

Some private organisations undertake a long-term approach to evaluating and observe the progress of participants in their leadership programmes through the leadership pipeline. Such criteria as speed of promotion through the grades or success in obtaining applied for positions are used. From an organisational perspective success of the leadership development programme might be judged by how many top managers/leaders are recruited internally and how many externally; in other words the 'make' or 'buy' ratio. However, this measure has its limitations in the SCS as the number and rate of promotions is dictated by a number of factors related to the opportunities, requirements and appropriate functional skills. Also leadership skills are only one of the criteria applied in selection procedures and external recruitment may be a conscious choice to inject new blood and a fresh perspective and to aid networking.

The current method used to identify the need for leadership development in the first instance and to assess the impact of the training *ex post* is the performance review. Here the skills and competencies fitting the role profile and the success in achieving the goals set in the previous review are assessed and combined with 360 degree feedback give an indication of overall performance. This data could be linked more closely to the training although again there is no way in which a direct cause and effect connection can be made.

Evaluation theorists have also demonstrated that changed behaviour cannot be derived from training in a linear, cause and effect relationship. First, because the extent to which individuals are motivated to change, develop or to apply learning is influenced by their feelings, attitudes, values and expectations. Training interventions can only be successful when they address these individual characteristics and there is compatibility or congruence. Second, the training intervention is only the first stage of behavioural change. If the individual is willing to effect the behavioural change and apply the learning within the organisation the latter must be receptive. This involves line managers and other members of the organisation being willing to support and to cooperate in the change. Holton refers to this as the learning transfer system. Third, in addition to the opportunity to apply the learning, its success will also depend on the availability of the necessary resources and the cooperation of other members of the team or other stakeholders including political leaders.

Lewis (1994) provided a comprehensive list of why so little evaluation of training takes place especially at the highest levels. These include the confounding variables where it is impossible to unravel training outcomes from other stimuli such as pay increases or performance reviews; the non-quantifiable effect – where for example the results of soft skills training e.g. team building are difficult to quantify in tangible terms; costs outweighing benefits where the follow up evaluation study would actually cost more than the original problem; the act of faith effect where there seems to be strong sentiment that training is a 'good thing' and that evaluation is not

necessary; the training sensitivity effect- where trainers recognise that evaluation may point to the ineffectiveness of the training; and the organisation political effect – where the inhibiting effect of authority counters sound training practice. Supporting evidence of this analysis was found in the CIPD annual survey data which confirmed that many training practitioners found that ‘serious’ evaluation was too time-consuming (CIPD 2007); that managers rarely show interest in ‘traditional’ evaluation data (CIPD 2007); and that 80% of HRD professionals believe that training and development deliver more value to their organisation than they are able to demonstrate (CIPD 2006).

The current commitment of the SCS to improving the evaluation of its training, the emphasis in the capability studies of establishing the need for training especially leadership training and the evidence from the same studies that the vast majority of civil servants (80%) are satisfied with learning and development opportunities. Other statistics that 88% felt they had the leadership skills necessary to do their job and 77% were confident that their staff had the skills they need to deliver their objectives should, however, be treated with caution given the rapid rate of change in technology, knowledge and government policies. Only half of the 19 departments that will eventually be subject to the capability surveys have produced these results so there is no room for complacency but these recent developments do indicate a serious commitment on the part of the SCS to align the aims and objectives of the organisation, with the perceived need for training and development and a more rigorous approach to evaluating whether that need is being met by the training interventions.

What is still needed is an evaluation approach that monitors how well the organisation is *learning* and how well it uses that learning to achieve its strategic objectives. The ultimate goal of evaluation should be the development of the organisation’s learning capability. How to measure the rate of return on learning (ROL) is the search for the real Holy Grail. That is as difficult as measuring the value of learning within society and linking this to education. The economics of education is a well researched subject but although educational economists can put a money value on the cost of education and the growth rate of the economy that is a very partial view of the value of education to the various stakeholders including individuals, communities, civil organisations and society as a whole.

We believe that education is important and adds worth to our society even though we cannot measure it. We regularly check to see that it is keeping up with the knowledge and skills needs of society. We check too that the particular programmes it offers set out their goals and objectives and deliver on these to the satisfaction of the participants and quality regulators. We check and measure how many graduates get jobs and how satisfied the employers are although this does not measure the learning that is transferred. This is because the benefits from higher education happen over a long period of time, are diffused and cumulative and are affected by so many other intervening variables. Because we cannot measure the learning do we give up on education?

The ROI idea fits the economic, generic and rationalist approach to public management by numbers but is a very limited tool for evaluating anything’s true worth. Although there is a place for measurement there are some things that at this point in time we cannot measure with any accuracy and one is the contribution of learning to stakeholder interests within organisations. The

future of evaluation of the SCS leadership programmes will continue to be the search for the 'holy grail'. The journey is worth taking because so much is learnt on the way. But at this time evaluation of learning can only ever be a judgement and the judgement may be different depending on which stakeholder is making it. For the SCS it may be to demonstrate that it has the skills and leadership abilities to deliver what the government wants it to. In which case the leadership development programme can be seen as a survival strategy and its success could be assessed in terms of the ability of the civil service in general and the SCS in particular to survive in its present form. If the present leaders are right in thinking that leadership is the key to the success of the civil service in delivering on government policies and that a training intervention can 'produce' a corporate identity and a corps of strategic leaders and has faith that the programmes provided by the NSG can do this, then it is worth the investment whatever the return.

End note

iThe Management Charter Initiative was spearheaded by a number of leading British companies who were committed to the development of the chartered or professional manager. The aim was to encourage training and accreditation of recognised management skills using a NVQ framework.

References

- Bramley, P. (1991), *Evaluating Training Effectiveness*, McGraw Hill.
- Cabinet Office (1999), *Reform of the Civil Service*, London: The Stationery Office.
- Critten, P. (1993), *Investing in People: Towards Corporate Capability*, Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann.
- Donovan, P., Hannigan, K. and Crowe, D. (2001), The learning transfer system approach to estimating the benefits of training: the empirical evidence, *Journal of European Industrial Training* Vol 25, N0 2: 221-228.
- Easterby-Smith, M (1994) *Evaluating Management Development, Training and Education*, Aldershot: Gower.
- Fielden, J. and Pearson, P. (1979) *An Approach to Costing Training: Feasibility Study*, London: Peat, Marwick and Mitchell.
- Hamblin, A. (1974), *The Evaluation and Control of Training*, London: McGraw Hill.
- Holton, E. (1996), The Flawed Four- Level Evaluation Model, *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, Vol.7, No.1: 5-21.
- Holton, E, Bates, R and Ruona, W. (2000), Development of a Generalized Learning Transfer System Inventory, *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 4,: 333-360.
- Holton, E and Naquin, S. (2005), A Critical Analysis of HRD Evaluation Models From a Decision Making Perspective, *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 2: 257-280
- Horton, S. (2001), Competency Management in the British Civil Service, *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, Vol 13, No 4:354-68.
- Horton, S. (2006), Competencies in Human Resourcing, in Pilbeam, S and Corbridge, M. *People Resourcing: Contemporary HRM in Practice*, Essex: Prentice Hall
- Kearns, P. (2005), *Evaluating the ROI from Learning*, London: CIPD.
- Kirkpatrick D. (1967) Evaluation of Training in Craig, R. (Ed) *Training and Development Handbook*, McGraw Hill.
- Kirkpatrick, D. (1998) *Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels*, San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler
- Lewis, P. (1994), The Evaluation of Training: An organisational Culture Approach *Journal of European Industrial Training*, Vol. 18, No 8.
- Mager, R. (1975), *Preparing Instructional Objectives*, Fearon.
- Manpower Services Commission (1981) *Glossary of Training Terms*, London: HMSO.
- National School of Government (2007) www.nsg.gsi.uk

- Phillips, P. (2002), *Understanding the Basics of the Return on Investment in Training*, London: Kogan Paul.
- Rae, L. (2002), *Using Evaluation in Training and Development*, London: Kogan Paul
- Russ-Eft, D. and Preskill, H. (2001), *Evaluation in Organisations*, Cambridge: Perseus.
- Sugrue, H. and Kim, K. (2004), *ASTD State of the Industry Report*, Alexandria, Va: ASTD.
- Twitchell, S., Holton, E. and Trott, J. (2000), Technical Evaluation Processes in the United States, *Performance Improvement Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No 1:84-110.
- Warr, P., Bird, M. and Rackham, N. (1970), *The Evaluation of Management Training* Aldershot: Gower
-