

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CAPABILITY THROUGH BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

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#### Forces for Change

This introduction highlights external and internal factors which are influencing and supporting the way in which business and management programmes in Higher Education are developing. These include:

- (a) the debate about British management and business education, stimulated by various major reviews (1)
- (b) changing interpretations of the manager's role
- (c) developments in our understanding of learning processes
- (d) various initiatives that are raising issues about learning processes and outcomes generally in HE, including Enterprise in Higher Education, Higher Education for Capability, and BTEC/SCOTVEC

Business and management studies are concerned with relevance and performance effectiveness. The developments outlined above focus attention on not just the 'what' of learning but also on the 'how'.

#### *British Management and Business Education*

As Constable and McCormick (1986, p. 6) recognise, 'One of the most important resources possessed by the nation is its managerial skills.' (2) Yet, to the British management it has always been more of a practical art than an applied science.' (3) Nevertheless, business and management education has become an established subject of study in British Higher Education.

Even so, considerable tensions exist between the academic and business communities over the sort of education and training which ought to be provided (Whitley, R. Thomas, A. & Marceau, J. (1981). Indeed, it has been suggested that as a consequence, there is no field of education, and probably no field of human endeavour, which is so healthily self-critical as that of management education.' (Forrester, P. 1984).

As perceived initially by Franks (Franks, 1963), the purpose of management education should be to improve the effectiveness and capability of managers in whatever environment they operate. But what constitutes management effectiveness and capability and, in turn, what kinds of academic knowledge, processes and assessment strategies will foster its development?

#### *The Manager's Role*

Since the early 1970s, studies have attempted to define the characteristics of effective management but, as Bennett (Bennet, 1984) has demonstrated, there is no uniform definition. Such studies emphasise, though, the importance of developing not only knowledge and awareness, but also understanding and capability in both the 'hard' functions, such as marketing and finance, and the 'soft' functions, such as leadership, communication and decision making.

In addition there is growing awareness that managers must continue learning during their working life and help others in the organisation do the same. Thus, how they learn and the development of this capability is becoming as significant as what they learn. Indeed, the former could be regarded as one constant of working life when compared to the increasingly transitory nature of knowledge.

#### *The Process of Learning*

Research has also raised issues about the utility of what might be termed the conventional classroom approach to learning with its disproportionate emphasis on the student's ability to acquire and record knowledge.

Considerable debate within management and business education has focussed upon the role of action (Revens, R.W., 1971) and more recently experiential learning (4). Recent research into 'deep' rather than 'surface' learning (5) and adults as learners (6) is also having an impact by focusing attention on the role of the tutor, the learning needs of the individual and the importance of students taking greater responsibility for their own learning, individually and in groups (7). Indeed, there is growing recognition that the quality of learning can be enhanced by giving students the opportunity and motivation to apply their knowledge. Mintzberg (Mintzberg, 1990) is quite explicit: 'We are taught a skill through practice plus feed-back, whether in a real or simulated situation.'

### ***Other forces for change***

Government agencies are also raising questions about what and how we teach and how we can best help others learn. The Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) (CNAA, 1984) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) (HMI, 1989) have supported the inclusion of skills acquisition and participative learning methods in higher education courses.

The work of the Business and Technical Education Council (BTEC) and the Scottish Vocational Education Council (SCOTVEC) is exerting an ever greater influence on the prior experience and expectations of students by emphasising the value of activity based learning, greater employer involvement and learning to learn.

Equally, the Partnership Awards and Enterprise in Higher Education have helped to stimulate and recognise innovation. The latter in particular has complemented Higher Education for Capability's (HEfC) emphasis on active and interactive learning and on students assuming more responsibility and accountability for their own learning.

### ***The Management Charter Initiative***

Recently, radical changes to the learning process in business and management education have been proposed, including the concept of a Management Charter Initiative (MCI). These proposals (8) are part of a trend towards competence and outcome based approaches to education as evidenced in the work of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) (Jessup, G., 1991) and the Universities Council for Adult and Continuing Education (UCACE) Learning Outcomes Project (UDACE, 1991).

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of the MCI has been the adoption of what might be termed a 'standards' approach in the definition of competence. This initiative is arousing considerable debate in management and business education about, for example:

the concept of a national list of competences

whether competence development can or should be the focus of higher education

how competence should be examined/assessed

### ***The Debate***

The debate about competence as opposed to a broader notion of capability will continue. A Manifesto for Management Development has now been launched as a counterpoint to MCI. The thrust of the counter-arguments is that a broader and longer-term approach to business and management education - more akin to that advocated by the RSA HEfC initiative - is required. MCI critics point to factors such as the sheer pace of change, equal opportunities, developments in Europe and the complex realities managers face in their roles.

The key issue is whether participants should work to a prescribed set of narrowly defined competences, or themselves be involved in the continuous formulation and re-formulation of criteria by which their performance is judged, especially in different kinds of organisational and cultural contexts. The latter places emphasis on the continuing learning and development of managers and their capability to be responsible and accountable for managing that process. (9)

### ***Conclusion***

The management and business education debate is not being conducted in a vacuum. It is occurring in the context of very significant developments in the form and process of learning in Higher Education generally and in the light of changing demands from the turbulent environment within which the sector operates.

Higher Education for Capability offers much of value to such current debates. Academics and their clients need to be aware of how the sector is responding to the general thrust of the campaign, and why.

From Quality in Learning, edited by John Stephenson and Susan Weil, published by Kogan Page, London in 1992.

Download the Quality in Learning Introduction file from the ICLML catalogue for details of other chapters in this book ([www.iclml.com](http://www.iclml.com))

The examples that follow illustrate some of these responses. They aim to contribute to the vitality and direction of continuing debate and to encourage further developments that will enhance the quality of management and business education.

### **Theme One: Reviewing and Building on Experience**

Students of management and business studies bring to their studies life experience of being managed by parents, teachers, policies and procedures. More students have been and are in part-time employment. What do they know about managing people from being managed?

Encouraging the utilisation of past and current experience provides an effective starting point for learning. Conceptual understanding is enhanced, is more powerful and longer lasting when students can relate pertinent theory and principles to their experience.

The examples submitted placed little emphasis on drawing upon students prior experience. Those that did were largely post-experience courses. In contrast, undergraduate courses focussed on creating current and on-going learning experiences upon which further learning could build, as the first example illustrates. The examples used to raise issues relevant to this theme are:

Middlesex Polytechnic's Business School: a development which places B A Business Studies (BABS) students at the centre of the learning experience {125}.

Teesside Polytechnic: a Certificate in Management Studies (CMS) module where participants critically review their current managerial performance as the basis for formulating a personal development plan {215}.

#### ***EXAMPLE 1: Learning from Teamwork: The First Year Experience Middlesex Business School***

97 first year students on the BA Business Studies {125}, a four year sandwich course, participated in a pilot workshop programme associated with the EHE initiative. Students worked in small teams with both a task and a process focus to their activities. The aim was to provide students with a different perspective on, and experience of, learning that would serve them well as managers in future.

The student group was divided into 17 small teams of 5 or 6 members. No criteria were used in selecting members for each team.

Task focus: each team generated a business idea and produced a business plan. These included: a home shopping service, a post-school nursery and a management training course. This year's activities involved the skills of applying financial, production, personnel and marketing knowledge to the development of the team's business ideas.

Process focus: teams met fortnightly for a staff-supervised three hour activity-based workshop, guided by explicit aims and objectives. Formal knowledge inputs about roles in groups and team work were provided.

The results of each group's activity were presented for assessment both in writing and orally. (See below under theme four for some further details)

#### ***Philosophy and Practice of Learning.***

This initiative was based on a view of undergraduate education which, in the words of the tutor:

***begins to put learning/the learner rather than teaching/the lecturer at the centre of our activities. We wanted students to begin to reflect on the how as well as the what of learning {125}.***

Learning is often taken for granted, as having a single meaning. Research, in fact, disproves this notion. Experiential activities designed to encourage students to reflect on their learning in different contexts help them appreciate the complexities of learning processes. In this case formal inputs were provided on:

***learning, including the social aspects of learning, different modes of learning, the use of experience and the setting of learning objectives. In subsequent workshops, they were required to put theory into practice. {125}***

### ***Preparing students for a process focus***

It is sometimes assumed that by putting students to work in teams, they will automatically learn from their experience. Rather, research shows that reflection on such experience, assisted by conceptual models, is essential if learning is to take place.

***The most important aspect of the programme, and one that is sometimes overlooked in group-based work, concerned the process whereby groups become teams and how each team operates to solve problems: that is, the team process. {125}***

In this case, support for this way of working was provided through:

***formal inputs;  
accountability criteria: ie for teams to analyse the team's process  
informal tutor-led (and latterly student-led) process consultation within individual teams. {125}***

The identification and improvement of communication skills was also an explicit aim of this programme. Communication can be improved through experience, practice and feedback, but learning will be enhanced by conceptual input and reflection opportunities:

***In this case formal inputs, including videos, were provided on both making presentations and non-verbal communications. {125}***

### ***Changes***

The success of programmes such as this is dependent upon changes to features normally taken for granted, including:

the role of the student and student groups

the role of the lecturer

the physical environment

### ***Students***

This programme placed different, and often unfamiliar expectations on students:

***They needed to become more active in their learning, and be less passive and dependent on lecturing staff. Because of the team-based nature of the programme, they were encouraged to participate and interact with their peers, academic staff and visitors from the outside world. This was not an easy change to make. {125}***

An evaluation of this programme revealed that a number of students had not worked in this way previously and were intimidated by the prospect:

***Learning in a group - with and from other people - has been a new experience for all of us.***

***At first I was absolutely terrified, nervous and apprehensive. I could not bring myself to say anything and neither could any one else. {125}***

The tutor asserts that:

***These feelings, though, can be present in lectures, seminars or tutorials. Emphases on active learning and on process provide opportunities which help overcome such anxieties; a passive approach to learning only reinforces them. {125}***

Learning about the advantages and disadvantages of team work, and strategies to overcome the difficulties, was one of the most frequently identified benefits of the programme:

***I believe any lessons we may have learned will be remembered for longer than anything learned in a more traditional way. {125}***

### ***Lecturers' roles***

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Lecturers too had to become less the 'fount of all knowledge' and more facilitators of learning. They too had to engage in a more complex set of activities, including:

*working as a team, exerting influence rather than control, explaining and justifying the form and content of the programme, engaging in discussion and debate, dealing with here and now issues, being a process consultant and accepting feedback. {125}*

#### **Physical environment**

*For students to work in teams they need an environment which facilitated this, that is, tables and chairs to accommodate a team of up to six people and for as many teams as are meeting for a particular workshop. Currently, all our large rooms are arranged for formal lectures. {125}*

#### **Conclusion**

##### **The social dimension of learning**

The affiliation needs of students, now well documented in research, and especially that on drop-out of mature students in the mass HE system of North America, are all too often met only through out-of-class activity. This can leave overseas, part-time and mature students with a sense of isolation that can undermine their motivation and engagement with a programme. As an overseas student commented:

*The most successful part of the workshops has been the team work. A group who had never seen each other before from different backgrounds and cultures having to work closely together - this leads to each individual having a more balanced and broad outlook. {125}*

The social dimension of learning - when made an explicit and valued academic concern - should not be underestimated when considering the overall quality of student experience.

##### **New dimensions to quality evaluation.**

These students were exposed to different experiences and meanings of learning than found traditionally in HE programmes. This programme provides a different reference point from which to determine what counts as quality and raises issues about the paradigms within which appraisal of professional performance, student evaluation, quality ratings and resource decisions are located.

##### **EXAMPLE 2: Experienced-Based Development of Management Competencies**

At *Teesside Business School* a compulsory module of the Certificate in Management Studies -Managing Self in a Social Context {215} - enables participants to define their skill and learning needs in relation to their current employment and their aspirations for advanced study. Participants are part-time students, mostly in their first management posts, with an average age of 30.

Learners generate profiles of themselves. They diagnose their present levels of management capability through undertaking a variety of enquiry procedures designed to promote self-evaluation. For example, they are required to provide details of their background, engage in self evaluation, identify measurable goals, specify how these will be achieved and indicate their success criteria. The outcome of these processes is a personal development plan related to the capabilities they see as necessary for their satisfactory performance in employment. These plans are implemented at work.

Participants make oral and visual presentations of their self analyses and personal programmes in the context of peer group review and aid the group in agreeing capability levels relevant to a variety of management activities. Throughout the module, they are accountable for communicating and reporting on the outcome of their plan, indicating further development needs and how they intend to meet them. The emphasis is thus on self-critical and continuing appraisal of personal development needs in the context of employment.

This module was introduced for the benefit of students who were returning to Higher Education, or who were uncertain of their career development. It has now been incorporated into the CNA validated Certificate in Management.

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Assessment is by portfolio, incorporating a personal development plan, the students own support-learning agenda, an evaluation of outcomes of diagnostic materials, and evaluation of Peer Group Reviews. There is no unseen time-constrained examination of the module.

#### ***New skills for tutors***

The role of tutors on this programme is more participant than provider; more mentor than teacher. Tutors need to

***inculcate in participants a frank awareness of personal strengths and weakness through the formal study of the nature of human activity systems and capability development. {215}***

This course is based firmly on developmental principles but tutors need to ensure that the end of this module is not the end of the developmental process because of

***One of its aims to produce a life-planning approach to personal capability in employment. {215}***

The emphasis on continuous development and self-appraisal requires lecturers themselves to demonstrate a capacity for critical reflection on their own performance:

***Relatively few teachers possess the ability to inspire participants to question what material needs to be learned, what skills developed and why. Negotiation towards personal development requires teachers to be comfortable in human relations, confident in academic discussion, knowledgeable about a wide range of workplaces, and good communicators. {215}***

Tutors are also challenged to develop new ways to manage academic learning structures and processes which are responsive

***to the practical requirements of employment, in the context of the capabilities of the individual. {215}***

#### ***Discovering the validity of an alternative approach***

The impetus for this module grew out of

***a number of competence-based developments within the School. In addition, individual staff members attended seminars and a national conference on the subject of skills, competence and capability. {215}***

In this example the individual's development plan becomes an integral part of the curriculum. Aimed at returning post-experience students, it was intended to be an intellectual exercise as well as a practical exploration of individual goals and intentions. The major obstacles were

***attitudes towards a relatively high proportion of skills to knowledge compared with past programmes and the need for a lower staff student ration. The first has been overcome primarily by staff development and employer pressure for greater efficiency and the second by exploring different methods of curriculum delivery. {215}***

What counts as academic knowledge is a growing debate. Skills learning and the technical application of knowledge has traditionally been regarded as of lower status in the academic world. In some arenas even education and business degrees themselves are suspect bodies of knowledge.

Although the module counts for one quarter of the final assessment, it has been found that it

***plays a far more important part in overall course activity than is suggested by this figure. It sets the scene for many other activities and the development of a wide range of skills, all geared to agreed capability levels in keeping with the MCI initiative. At the same time, although students know what to expect from the programme, they can also influence and add to the competences that are staff-generated or MCI influenced. {215}***

Staff confidence from increased experience of working in alternative ways has created the motivation to extend this approach to a wide range of management programmes from first to senior levels:

***We are in the first year of running a modular management development programme of a highly integrated nature in which personal development planning will form a major initial component. {215}***

### **Resource implications**

Implementation of this module has required the allocation of

*time and other resources to classroom presentations, general discussions, remedial guidance of participants and structured peer-group review sessions. {215}*

The major resource implication has been

*staff time in liaison with participants at their workplaces for the purpose of eliciting job-performance information. {215}*

This approach also requires time

*for small group and one to one discussion is necessary, even though typical tuition within the School operates normally at a much higher group size. In terms of group presentations and personal assessment sessions, some expenditure is necessary for audio-visual equipment. {215}*

### **Conclusion**

Though more resource intensive than a conventional approach, an approach which focuses on learners' experience and interests has been shown to work effectively and is providing the impetus and example for further change. The value and validity of this alternative approach to management development became somewhat clearer when lecturers actually became involved in working actively with participants. Many of those involved have begun to realise that

*Students should be involved in setting the goals of their own capability acquisition. It is resource intensive, though not excessively so, but requires a more fundamental change in attitude towards teaching and learning on the part of all participants. {215}*

## **Theme Two: Planning, Negotiating and Approval**

Challenging students to take more responsibility for their learning, to learn how to set goals and critically review their performance, is particularly pertinent to the development of managers. Managers are obliged to be responsible for others. At the very least, therefore, participants must learn to take responsibility for themselves.

As managers they will be appraising others' performances. Again, they need opportunities to do the same with their own performance. Managers also have to find ways of meeting their own continuous development needs within their organisations: a balance between individual goals and those of the company will always be a subject for negotiation. It is therefore appropriate that experience of such negotiations be integral to their education and that there is scope for contracts to involve their own managers, mentors or company representatives.

The use of learning agreements and active student participation in negotiating learning aims and outcomes are generally found on post-experience courses. This is likely to change, as BTEC shapes the expectations of entrants to HE. For example, all BTEC students must now keep a profile of their competency achievements. The examples used to illustrate Theme 2 are:

Roffey Park: an MBA validated by University of Sussex based entirely on student negotiation. {163}

Durham University Business School: a one year postgraduate qualification in Enterprise Management using learning contracts for management development. {36}

### **EXAMPLE 1: a University Validated MBA by Self Managed Learning**

At *Roffey Park Institute* a two year part-time executive MBA programme validated by University of Sussex {163} was introduced in January, 1990. The entire course is based on the principles of learner responsibility and accountability. Participants thus manage their own learning and assessment, individually and collectively. There are six key elements in this self-managed learning programme:

*The Philosophy of Self-Managed Learning (SML)*  
*The Learning Contract*  
*Mapping the Field*  
*The Set*  
*The Assessment Process*  
*The Tutorial Support {163}*

***The Philosophy of Self-Managed Learning.***

This programme is rooted in core values about the process of managing:

- (a) Managing is an active process. Managers need to be able to demonstrate that they can manage.*
- (b) Managers are required to make sophisticated and difficult judgements... Therefore, it is appropriate that they they submit their judgements to the scrutiny of peers as part of the management development process.*
- (c) Managers should manage their own learning if they are also to manage others. {163}*

***The Learning Contract***

SML is a process by which managers devise their own programmes of work and study. The Learning Contract provides the means whereby rigour can be maintained:

*{This} is the mechanism which ensures that managers do set learning goals/targets. To help them in this process, managers are commonly asked to think through given questions. {163}*

For example:

- \* Where have I been? Where am I now?*  
*Outcomes: Clarification of learning needs*
- \* Where do I want to go? What skills do I need ?*  
*Outcomes: definition of goals*
- \* How do I get these?*  
*Outcomes: initial formulation of plan of action*
- \* How will I know if I have arrived?*  
*Outcomes: Initial formulation of basis for assessment. {163}*

The Learning Contract is however a two way process. Managers are expected to agree their learning goals firstly with their support group (or Set) and secondly with their organisation. As such SML represents a very concrete way of tying management development directly into organisational strategy, which would appear to be a growing concern in organisations today.

The Learning Contract is also about getting learners to think about the process of learning itself.

*By encouraging a manger to think through not just what, but also HOW he/she might learn, individuals think back to past learning experiences, both positive and negative, and what that says about the sorts of approaches to learning which appear to work for them. {163}*

This initial Learning Contract is not fixed. Participants are able to re-negotiate their contracts over time. Evaluation research does show, however, that perceptions of negotiation can vary considerably and can be seen by some participants as an admission of failure or a miscalculation.' The blank slate'approach can also be heavily criticised, on valid managerial grounds. Thus one participant pointed out that, far from operating with a blank piece of paper', managers invariably face barriers to learning because of their organisational settings. Such barriers should be acknowledged in the initial contract, thereby reflecting the realities of organisational life.

***Mapping the Field***

The last point above leads to the need to help learners to make choices. On the MBA the first seven months is both a time to write a learning contract and a time when course participants are given a chance to see how a range of

experts define management. At the end of seven months they not only have to produce a learning contract but also an essay of up to 20,000 words analysing their own perspective on the field of management. Further, they are encouraged to find a mentor in their organisation so that a bridge is maintained into the organisation's needs and direction.

### ***The Set***

The set provides another accountability framework, and a challenge to critics who see self managed learning as merely self indulgent or lacking in rigour. As in many action learning programmes,

***individuals are formed into groups (of five) for the purpose of offering support and feedback and the benefit of their experience. {163}***

For most, the experience of sets tends to be very positive and powerful:

***I think its very useful having people who I can actually be totally honest with.***

***It was very personally stressful but beneficial - I had one or two intense periods of time which were very painful but I knew I was learning. It was done in such a way that I found very constructive...it was done primarily through the sets but also through the set advisers. {163}***

This last point underlines the reality that there is little significant learning without pain. This raises issues for student evaluations of teaching and learning. Critical or mistimed feedback could lead to learner responsibility and accountability being rejected, or becoming instrumental and little more than an exercise in collusion. Only by ensuring that these processes are genuinely rooted in dialogue and in an appropriate balance of challenge and support can HE assist in the rigorous development of the person and intellect.

### ***Assessment***

The learning contract, including the objectives agreed originally and re-negotiated over time, provide the basis for a collaborative assessment process.

***Anyone managing their own learning should be able to judge their own work...However, these self evaluations need to be checked with others, and so the course requires that the individual's peers (the set) form a crucial "check and balance" on the personal judgement. {163}***

Additionally, employers, external examiners and the set adviser are involved in the process, which can, therefore, be far more rigorous than traditional methods. Although peer led, the process can nevertheless result in student failure.

***By adding the set adviser's judgement, the useful "expert view" of a traditional assessment process has an equal voice and the decision on a pass or fail has to be reached by consensus. {163}***

Where consensus is impossible, external examiners are more directly involved.

### ***Tutorial Support***

A key person in the process of tutorial support is the set adviser. Possible roles, which can be the subject of negotiation, include:

***(a) Ordinary set member: giving information and ideas.***

***(b) Catalyst: doing something that no one else is doing, such as confronting issues that no one else is prepared to.***

***(c) Process consultant: helping with the process by which things are done, such as conflict resolution or effectiveness reviews.***

***(d) Link person: acting as a contact with other interested parties such as employers.***

***(e) Adviser: identifying resources, and ground rules that course members have to abide by. {163}***

### ***Evaluation***

Evaluation research is currently being carried out on the first graduates

**EXAMPLE 2: Contracting for On The Job and Off The Job Learning.**

At *Durham University Business School* a one year postgraduate Diploma in Enterprise Management { 36} is offered to students of any discipline. The course begins with a two week residential introduction to management, based on experiential learning approaches. Participants are then matched with a company where they are employed on a full-time permanent basis.

Students are responsible and accountable for their own learning via the following:

On the job learning

*a learning contract, negotiated at the beginning of each term between the student, the employer and the student's academic mentor.*

*a series of three projects agreed between the three parties involved, one of which forms the basis of a dissertation {36}*

Off the job learning

*monthly workshops (2-3 days) which concern both functional and personal competence development. The precise content of the workshops is negotiated between the group and the course director.*

*a learning support group which operates both outside and inside the formal workshop sessions, incorporating elements of peer group appraisal. {163}*

Candidates are assessed throughout the year and also by two formal seen examinations, one of which is a case study. The employer is also involved in assessing the extent to which the student has met his/her learning objectives.

**Ensuring rigour**

Each student is placed in a small or medium enterprise to provide realistic experience of management. This enables them to learn how taking responsibility and being self reliant increases their confidence to take action and make decisions.

The course is designed to ensure that placements enhance the academic quality of the learning experience. Students are accountable not only for the development of functional and interpersonal competences, but also for ensuring that this is actively linked to a sound understanding of relevant theory.

The emphasis on responsibility ensures that the learner is continually obliged to make meaningful connections between practice and theory, in ways that are conducive to deep, rather than surface learning, and to more effective performance.

**Resistances and extensions**

When introduced, this course's explicit emphasis on a holistic understanding of management and on creativity, communication, competence and co-operation provoked scepticism. This came equally from academics, employers and sponsors:

*These resistances were overcome largely by obtaining funding from the European Social Fund, and securing the approval of both the Board of Studies in Business Management and the Senate of the University...This in turn attracted public sector sponsorship, employer contribution and student registrations. Throughout, however, the provision of adequate and appropriate staff resources has been a problem, often having to be overcome by engaging tutors and mentors from outside the Business School. {36}*

Now, with a culture shift:

*staff were prepared for their role as mentors through induction programmes. There is also a programme steering committee to provide advice and guidance. {36}*

The culture shift is due largely to there being more emphasis on negotiating, contracting and student responsibility within university courses.

Staff and employers have also benefited, as has the School and the institution:

*The course facilitates links with local small and medium sized enterprises in the region and demonstrates the contribution which higher education can make to company performance.*

*For the employer, the course provides an additional resource which enables projects to be undertaken which might otherwise not have been completed. Similarly it extends the company's network of business contacts to include higher education and breaks down any barriers which might have existed resulting from their perception and prejudices. Finally, it helps convince employers of the benefits of graduate recruitment and gives them an entrance to higher education. The Local Authority sponsors benefit by retaining intellectual capital in the region and through the development of the small and medium enterprise sector of the local economy..{36}*

#### **Student and employer feedback**

Information aimed at reducing resistance was secured through continual monitoring, including through an external evaluator from the European Community who had a particular interest in employer and regional benefits. Employers have made the following comments:

*Universal have used Tony's [a student] enthusiasm and the support of Durham University's Business School to provide us with a major step forward in quality enhancement and product design. (David West, Universal Transformers)*

*Tony, with an Archaeology degree, has breathed young life into aspects of our business and given us a different perspective. ( Bill Heaney, Bill Heaney Ltd)*

*Jim, who did an Accountancy degree, has fitted in very well. The course has provided considerable benefit to him and so to us. Jim is now a part of our small management team - we need him. (Peter Bell, Mailcom) {36}*

The benefits to students have been monitored via the Board of Examiners which includes moderation by an external assessor:

*Apart from gaining competence in, and an understanding of, management, most students have gained in confidence and developed as individuals, often being offered employment on completion of the course. {36}*

More specifically:

*The support network has been brilliant. A monthly visit to DUBS does much to restore your self esteem and determination. Having done a pure arts degree the course provided me with an excellent bridge." (Sara MacLeod, BA Joint Honours, Harrison Brothers Ltd)*

*My last job was with a large multinational company and I felt I was just a number - someone to be forgotten about. Here I am much more involved and have a lot more responsibility.(Keith Thompson, BSC Mec Eng, NICE Ltd.).{36}*

#### **Conclusion**

Whereas students and employers are perhaps more forthcoming about the benefits, this course still represents an interesting departure from normal academic practice. The weight of tradition, the status given to pure theoretical knowledge rather than to its application, remain more difficult obstacles to overcome. Resource cutbacks pose further challenges:

*The main factors likely to influence the further development of programmes based on student responsibility are a change of attitude within Higher Education (many remain unconvinced of the benefits of such an approach) and additional resources to enable staff to develop the programme to its and their full potential. {36}*

### **Theme Three: Active and Interactive Learning**

Active and interactive learning opportunities help students relate learning the real business of being managers to more formal material. Whilst the use of projects is increasing, they do not guarantee quality learning processes and outcomes. They can in fact become an exercise in doing what is necessary to pass. Students can also experience projects as being in a vacuum, bearing no relationship to what has been learned in other parts of a course.

Experience and action do not in themselves guarantee learning. We learn through doing and through reflection on doing. To be effective, students need guidance and time to reflect on active and interactive learning outcomes. Such learning will benefit from recurring dialogues about the coherence, the meaning and the interrelatedness of capability based course components to the whole of students' educational experience.

The following examples, while not addressing all of these concerns, aim to stimulate further debate and development:

Middlesex Polytechnic: Year 2 students (BA Business Studies) engage in company-based group problem solving, on issues currently challenging these organisations. {126}

2) Sheffield City Polytechnic: the integration of a personal skill and qualities approach, involving the use of portfolios, for students taking the Financial Decision Making option on the BA (Hons) Accounting and Management Control course {173}

#### ***EXAMPLE 1: Off Site Learning - The Power of the Real***

At *Middlesex Polytechnic* company-based problem solving provides the major task focus for the second year of a two year Enterprise Workshop programme {126}. Using off-site and on company premises, small teams of students (5-6) are presented with a real organisational problem. Approximately 20 companies provide the context within which teams are accountable for collecting data on the issues and making an oral and written presentation on the results of their efforts, including recommendations for action, to company personnel.

Staff take responsibility for negotiating entry to organisations, including Osram, Manpower and the London Borough of Barnet. An outline of the problem to be addressed is agreed in advance. These are of genuine concern to the organisations involved. The dates of teams' first and final visits to their specific organisation are also finalised by lecturing staff. Within these parameters, students are free to manage the exercise as they see fit. The Autumn term preparation entails a focus on organisations and change: why change, what to change and how to change. In addition to a formal knowledge input, students attend a programme of three hour workshops where they work in teams on tasks which encourage them to apply that knowledge. At the same time, they focus on the team process and oral presentations. (Additional preparation comes through a first year programme described under Theme one.)

Assessment includes the following:

- a written report to the organisation
- an oral presentation to company representatives

Company representatives were involved in the assessment of oral reports produced for their organisations and in the provision of feedback to the teams on their performances.

#### ***The meaning of off-site learning***

In this example, off-site does not refer to any arena in which learning takes place, but rather to

***a pre-determined and specified location - an organisation - which is unconnected with and geographically separate from the usual environment in which students experience teaching and learning, in this case the Business School. {126}***

Learning in situations that really matter to those involved - to clients and students alike - can be extremely powerful. This factor was critical to the achievement of course objectives by students. The programme intended that by its conclusion, students would, for example, have:

***clarified a real organisational problem***

*collected and analysed relevant data*

*utilised Polytechnic-based learning*

*recommended appropriate courses of action*

*demonstrated that they could work as a team*

*effectively presented themselves and their work {126}*

### ***The power of the real***

Feedback from students suggested that the objectives referred to above were achieved. This exercise was powerful for them because,

*it engaged their interest or motivated them; it was powerful because it was both challenging and enjoyable. Why should this be so? The significance of being in 'a real organisation' or a 'real firm' was often referred to:*

*I think the first thing that actually got us interested in this was the fact that we were dealing with something serious that was actually relevant to someone and had some importance to an external organisation. {126}*

The reality and power of the learning exercise was further enhanced by virtue of the fact that students had contact at managerial level:

*Whilst most students have worked in organisations, few had any contact with senior personnel. The level of their contact, and the expertise and experience these post-holders were perceived to possess, was seen to add a degree of credibility and importance to what the teams were doing. {126}*

### ***People not students***

As importantly, students were struck by the treatment they encountered in their interactions with their organisations:

*We were treated as people, as consultants; it made us feel really good.*

*Everyone treated us with respect and as adults not as students.*

*We were not introduced as students but as people who may be able to help them. {126}*

For young students, who made up the majority on this programme, this was a critical factor in their development. Equally, they recognised their own responsibilities in managing the reality with which they were presented:

*For this task we had to change ourselves from students to professionals and to adopt a professional style, ie, being systematic, being well prepared and working effectively as a team. {126}*

They were aware that:

*It is essential that the client takes you seriously. For example, dressing smartly, appearing confident, and interested, and knowing what you are talking about. {126}*

Being involved in a real organisation also helped to underline for students the significance of theory in relation to practice:

*(This experience) gave me the first indication that a knowledge of [management] theory did actually have a place in reality. {126}*

Indeed, experience of organisational reality helped one student to learn:

*never to dismiss something as mere theory. {126}*

The course tutor remarks,

*It would appear that reality as defined here supports rather than undermines knowledge of theory. {126}*

### **Gains for employers**

The problems participating organisations identified included:

*how to respond to radical environmental change  
how to improve the induction of new staff  
how to facilitate inter-departmental communications {126}*

Industrial partners indicated that the outcomes of this pilot programme were significant:

*The students got interesting feedback for us which we couldn't have got ourselves. Lots of things they said we were aware of, but they formalised and defined ideas for us. They forced us to take action. (Training Manager)*

*Last year's group was very good. They changed our perceptions of why staff come and go. As a result, we changed our recruitment focus and turnover has been reduced. (Personnel Manager) {126}*

### **Conclusions**

#### **Risk taking**

This programme was introduced with the ostensible aim of providing opportunities for student learning through closer collaboration with other organisations. In the context of this Business School, this off-site, small team working was unusual for undergraduate students:

*Our experience has led us to conclude that it was worth taking the risk...We as lecturers must be alive to the fact that the nature of the tasks we set have a profound impact on the degree to which we encourage or discourage learning. One way to encourage learning is to engage students with real life. We need to expose and exchange other methods which will perform the same function. {126}*

#### **Learner self-esteem**

An unanticipated outcome of this exercise was that students' self esteem was significantly bolstered. The extent to which students commented about being treated as people, as adults' suggests that this was a relatively new experience and gives rise to the question about whether and how:

*lecturers' attitudes to students encourage a sense of self-worth or not. {126}*

#### **EXAMPLE 2: The strategic use of case studies to develop student capability.**

At *Sheffield City Polytechnic* the BA (Hons) in Accounting and Management Control {173} includes a final year option in Financial Decision Making. Here the development of personal skills and qualities is integrated into a course that is entirely case study and group based. The case studies are chosen to examine problem situations of a broad business nature. They are multi-disciplinary and encourage problem identification as well as problem solving. Students work in different groups for each case. Role play and structured tasks foster the integration of subject knowledge, personal skills and creative thinking processes.

The case studies derive from the experience of staff. Increasingly, partnerships with industry, commerce and the accounting profession give rise to jointly developed materials which also meet the training needs of the organisations concerned.

Case studies are approached by using a standard three step procedure for each one:

- (a) A briefing session where the case is distributed, the requirements outlined and students are allocated to groups
- (b) A session where the case is run, whether by role playing or presentations
- (c) A debriefing session where students are encouraged to analyse their potential solutions and their experience.

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This procedure takes approximately two weeks. During this time students are responsible for convening informal meetings to develop their work.

This course developed in response to the demand of accountancy firms, who required more than technical skills from graduate recruits. In 1990 it won the 'Group Skills in Accountancy Partnership Award' provided by Coopers Lybrand Deloitte Chartered Accountants. The subject will become core in 1992/3.

***Developing academic, personal and subject specific skills simultaneously***

The objectives of this group-centred learning programme are identified as:

***1. Personal skills and qualities: students should have identified and developed***

***(a) the ability to work within a group and the communication skills this involves***

***(b) the negotiation skills necessary in identifying and analysing a problem and proposing solutions within a group***

***(c) the need within a group to allocate tasks and motivate others***

***(d) recognition and acceptance of leadership qualities and skills***

***(e) presentation skills, intra or inter group***

***(f) the ability to question assumptions, listen to arguments and respond accordingly.***

***2. Academic skills: Students should be able to***

***(a) identify the particular subject skills and knowledge appropriate to a particular problem***

***(b) appreciate the difficulties involved in clearly defining problem areas***

***(c) apply and integrate previously acquired subject skills and knowledge***

***(d) classify, organise and evaluate information into a suitable format for the application of decision making techniques. {173}***

The explicit aim is therefore to use learning strategies which encourage skills development that go well beyond the traditional taxonomy of academic skills:

***These learning methods must be sufficiently adaptable to encourage students to enter into 'live' discussions, debates and arguments about very real business issues. {173}***

The nature of tutor involvement has been carefully thought through, based on experience over a number of years:

***The learning methods are monitored by at least one tutor being in attendance whenever the students meet to present their opinions, choices or views about a particular case. If the participants see an issue quickly and resolve it, then the cases used are sufficiently adaptable to introduce new variables which are pre-planned by the tutoring staff and which it has been suggested may, or may not arise, in the case scenario. {173}***

***Monitoring and evaluation: the need for a more responsive approach***

In this situation, continual monitoring and review is central to the culture of this course, and is seen by tutors as a core responsibility:

***This process establishes an interactive cycle of monitoring which means case material, presentation and group process is reviewed and amended if necessary. {173}***

The course is also subject to internal monitoring procedures as prescribed within the Polytechnic, including staff/student consultative committees for each year of the course. However, these can prove inadequate to more student centred ways of working:

***Tutors believe that this particular process has too long a lead time for this style of course and that the monitoring of learning processes and methods is best done by adopting the interactive process described above. {173}***

#### ***Student experience***

Letters from students capture their perception of this programme; how their own understanding of learning and quality was transformed through the approach, thereby giving rise to new expectations of themselves as learners and of their HE experience. They both cite their overall development as having improved, not just their performance at work - but also their personal lives.

#### ***Conclusion***

Developing student responsibility and accountability is not limited to case study work within this Institution. Nevertheless, this traditional vehicle used in an innovative way, enhanced knowledge, improved skills and confidence, therefore providing a vehicle to develop capability.

### **Theme Four: Assessment**

#### ***Introduction***

As a consequence of our growing understanding of what promotes effective performance, either as learner or as manager, far greater emphasis is now placed on individuals and small groups being responsible and accountable for subjecting their own performance to continual review and monitoring. This is increasingly being reflected in H.E. assessment strategies, some of which now draw on far more sources of information, and involve others in addition to the subject tutor, including self, peers and employers. Journals, portfolios, projects and oral presentations are all vehicles for development and assessment. Assessment is thus becoming more multi-dimensional, in respect of what is assessed, how this is done, who is involved and for what purpose.

The examples that follow represent attempts to grapple with such issues by introducing new thinking and practice. The examples include:

Middlesex Polytechnic: group based peer assessment using team negotiated criteria for effective performance (see also Themes One and Two) {127}

Leeds Polytechnic: self generated, in-company project work and portfolios, based on multiple sources of information about performance, on the BA (Hons) in Public Relations. {88}

#### ***Group-Based Peer Assessment.***

At *Middlesex Polytechnic*, group-based peer assessment was introduced to the second year Enterprise workshop programme of the BA Business Studies {127}. Students worked in small teams on organisation-based problem solving. Peer assessment was introduced in the context of learner-centred teaching strategies and a commitment to less traditional modes of assessment. It was clearly geared to promoting learner responsibility and accountability.

In order to heighten consistency between course objectives and modes of assessment, the course team sought to send complementary rather than conflicting messages through the assessment process. Student input into the assessment provided a means for them to exert some control of the process, while exercising creativity and responsibility.

It was made clear from the outset that individuals were, as members of a working team,

***accountable for their actions to that team. At the same time, it (peer assessment) gave teams a potential control mechanism in respect of individual members and the authority to use it.***

***Assessment overall is based on individual effort and team output: the former category counts for 50% and includes a case analysis, an account of individual learning and peer assessment. The latter 50% comprises an oral and written presentation and a review of team process. Peer assessment counts for 10% of the individual's final mark. {127}***

Procedures for this assessment process are set out in the course handbook, and are introduced at the beginning of the academic year. The written parameters are as follows:

*Firstly, each team should devise a set of criteria which indicate the sort of behaviours which tend to help or hinder the teams' activities. Your criteria may include creativity, task performance, attendance, etc. It is for each team to decide.*

*Secondly, each member should be assessed in relation to these agreed criteria and be awarded a mark out of ten by the other members of the team, with a higher mark being awarded for more effective behaviour.*

*Thirdly, these marks should be clearly noted in your report, together with the team's justification for each member's mark. {127}*

Thus, the lecturers did not impose a set of criteria, recognising that while,

*there may be certain risks associated with this strategy, we believed that the benefits derived from ownership of the criteria were of greater significance. Additionally students had to provide a justification of the awarded mark. It was thus more than a numeric exercise. {127}*

The course team also recognised that such processes are largely unfamiliar to students, and preparation and support (both formal and informal) are vital:

*For example, they were provided with inputs on teamwork, peer assessment and giving feedback; they were given the opportunity to utilise this information in activity based workshops and were themselves given feedback by staff on their teams activities. {127}*

#### **Outcomes**

This approach proved to be anything but mechanistic or instrumental for students, but rather developmental and educational in number of unexpected ways:

*All but one group followed the instructions...and in most instances they went beyond their brief by, for example, outlining the process whereby they managed the exercise, and defining the categories in use. It was apparent that the task was taken very seriously indeed and that a degree of thought had gone into how the process could be best managed. {127}*

Groups certainly did not find the challenge of sharing responsibility for assessment easy. They reported:

*We spent a long time doing peer assessment  
The session proved both painful and useful, but always constructive. {127}*

This seemed to stem from the reluctance to express negative evaluations:

*One way to overcome this was to sanction such expressions. For example, as one student reported:*

*We agreed that the process should be constructive; there would be no hard feelings towards anyone who spoke their minds. {127}*

This approach emerged as part of an overall pattern of managing the complexities and of peer assessment:

*It involved the anticipation of problems and dealing with these by setting ground rules to which everyone agreed. This was seen as a means of ensuring fairness and reducing potential conflict. The ground rules for most groups involved brainstorming a set of criteria, agreeing these, applying them to an individual whilst they were out of the room, agreeing a numerical score and a rationale for this, giving the individual the opportunity to comment on their assessment and reaching agreement as a team. {127}*

The number and range of criteria used by the groups varied considerably:

*between 8 and 23, with the majority of groups using between 10 and 14. A number of groups reported having identified a larger number and then reducing these to a manageable size. {127}*

With regard to marking,

*No one scored below five or above nine. In the majority of groups a range of two marks was used and in only two groups was a range of four marks used to differentiate between members. This suggests a possible reluctance to differentiate dramatically between team members. Alternatively, it may well reflect the reality of team performances. What these results do demonstrate is that students will neither award themselves top marks when they are given the opportunity to do so; nor will they use the opportunity to settle scores by giving very low marks. {127}*

The responsible and analytical way that students approached the task is a common theme in reports of peer assessment.

*It suggests that the fears of those who object to such involvement are based on a perception of students which is not reflected in practice. It might even go some way to undermining those fears. {127}*

#### **Tutor role in peer assessment**

The tutor's role in such a process is inevitably going to be different and unfamiliar; it is specific and restricted:

*It involves ensuring that the criteria are met, and if they are, recording the mark awarded. This limited involvement is sometimes difficult to accept, especially when presented with work of varying quality. Any attempt to assess the quality of output must be resisted though. {127}*

The most difficult challenge is repeatedly reported as letting go of control:

*Having given the responsibility to the students the tutor can not then take it away. If this is done the exercise could no longer be defined as peer assessment. If we want to encourage responsibility in our students, we must provide them with opportunities to be responsible. {127}*

#### **Conclusion**

The means by which tutors introduce and facilitate a rigorous approach to peer assessment are critical: the legitimacy, the timing, the preparation, the instruction, and the support are crucial to success.

Tutor confidence in the validity and value of an alternative approach is essential. If the departmental culture discourages risk taking, pressures against alternative approaches to learning become strongest at the assessment stage. It is then that questions of quality are raised. This example shows how the quality of assessment experiences for students can be enhanced by giving them a degree of responsibility.

#### **EXAMPLE 2: A Portfolio Approach To Assessment.**

The *BA (Hons) Public Relations at Leeds Polytechnic*{88} was created with the objectives of Higher Education for Capability in mind. A core commitment to wedding theory and practice required the establishment of a Public Relations Studio, refurbished by sponsorship and the Polytechnic.

Each student is adopted by one of 83 public relations companies or in-house departments. Self-generated project work, and the creation of a portfolio of achievement as the means of assessment, are key features of the programme.

#### **The role of the portfolio**

Courses which emphasise active learning and skills development for specific career paths can raise concerns within an academic environment. Will higher learning, and understanding of theory and research, be given a low priority, or indeed abandoned altogether? This was an obstacle that the course team set out to tackle, via specified objectives for the portfolio approach. These were:

- (a) to give students the opportunity to put theory and learning into direct and meaningful practice
- (b) to encourage and recognise student achievement in applying public relations skills
- (c) to ensure that the full range of public relations skills have been acquired by the student prior to the conclusion of the degree programme
- (d) to demonstrate to potential employers that the student has achieved fully professional working standards across a wide range of public relations activities

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The portfolio is assembled continuously throughout the degree programme, with new elements added and older elements upgraded at frequent intervals. Assessment follows normal professional criteria:

***The most significant issue is whether its contents would be successful in normal commercial situations and upon whether the Portfolio would fully persuade a potential employer of its creator's abilities. High standards of accuracy and presentation are vital. {88}***

Students are required to exhibit and give formal presentations on their portfolios. The manner of these presentations is formally assessed.

Whilst examples of portfolio content are recommended it is made clear to students that they:

***are expected to find additional ways of demonstrating their creativity and initiative. {88}***

#### **Illustrative contents - Direct representation**

(a) Articles, reports and letters to editors: an early first year Portfolio might include word processed articles, reports sent to newsletters and letters sent to editors. These would be replaced at a later stage by writings in their published form.

(b) Media releases: copies of releases with distribution lists and evidence of any coverage gained.

(c) Leaflets/brochures: in their final printed form would be suitable: otherwise, the text, with plans for print, layout and illustrations .

(d) Business presentations: slides and/or acetates with presentation notes

(e) Photographs/illustrations: samples of work; published versions would be particularly valuable.

(f) Edited work: one or more newsletters, magazines, journals or occasional publications edited or co-edited by the student.

#### **(g) Illustrative contents - indirect representation**

In a number of cases there will be no immediate visual 'product' of public relations activity which can be placed in the Portfolio, and the activity thus has to be represented in an indirect manner. This will again test the students initiative, but some indicative examples follow.

(a) Market and opinion surveys: summaries of surveys, using graphic presentation.

(b) Exhibitions: promotional posters, plan diagrams, photographs of the exhibition and results achieved.

Opportunities for students to produce any or some of the above may result from staff directed activities, such as events management; from staff introductions to clients; from student initiated activities, such as participating in clubs and societies or from the company who has 'adopted' an individual learner.

#### **Conclusion**

This example demonstrates the wide range of artifacts and events which can form the basis of effective capability assessment. It strongly suggests that we should look beyond traditional modes which focus on unseen, timed and non-collaborative assessments. Rather we should be creative and, as in this case, utilise the the type of activities and outputs that a professional would produce as a means of providing quality assessment.

#### **Conclusion**

The eight examples presented above provide a flavour of the type and range of innovations that are currently being made by colleagues in HE institutions. They demonstrate the ways in which the "taken for granted" of teaching and learning is being effectively challenged in order to facilitate the acquisition of capability. In particular, the significance of collaboration, and of practices which are more in tune with the realities of life and work, are highlighted.

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Academics are working in partnership with a number of their client groups to a greater extent than in the past. These clients include the learner, their peers, the learner's sponsor and other outside organisations. The focus of collaborative work includes:

- (a) utilising past and current experience, both in and out of class, to aid the process of learning;
- (b) helping clients decide their learning objectives and aspirations;
- (c) engaging clients in decisions about the process and sources of learning;
- (d) involving a variety of clients in assessing the outcomes of the learning processes.

Thus the nature of formally recognised learning relationships has become more complex. Whilst their management demands a different use of resources, the results extend the degree of responsibility and accountability by involving all who have an interest in the learning process.

At the same time, the growing use of alternative sources of learning, and the focus on different ways of learning in HE courses, encourage the integration of what is taught and what is utilised both in work and in life generally. Courses which take account of the world outside HE institutions, of professional and organisational practice, demonstrate ways in which theory and practice can be strongly linked. In this way, learners are encouraged to recognise that they can continue developing over time, rather than restricting their opportunities to those provided on educational and training courses.

## Notes

The introduction was prepared with the help of Prof. David Kirby, Durham University Business School.

(1) See for example: Constable, J and McCormick, R (1987) *The Making of British Managers*. North Hants: British Institute of Managers; MCI (1990) *Management Competences: The Standards Project*. Management Charter Initiative; Handy, C, Gordon, C, Gow, I and Randlesome, C (1988) *Making Managers*, London: Pitman; Training Agency (1989) *Management Challenge for the 1990s*. Sheffield: TA

(2) Constable and McCormick, p. 6, as above

(3) Handy et al, p. 7, as above

(4) Kolb, D A (1984) *Experiential Learning: experience as the source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall; Weil, S W and McGill, I (1989) *Making Sense of Experiential Learning*. Milton Keynes: SRHE/GU

(5) See for example: Marton, F, Hounsell, D and Entwistle, N (1984) *The Experience of Learning*; Ramsden, P (1988) *Improving Learning: New Perspectives* ; CNA A Improving Student Learning Project (1990-1), Oxford Centre for Staff Development

(6) See for example: Knowles, Malcolm (JS Insert learning contracts ref

(7) See for example: Prideaux, S and Ford, J.E. (1988) *Management Development Competences: Teams, learning contracts and work experience based learning*. *Journal of Management Development*, 7, 3, 13-22

(8) Handy et al (1988) , as above

(9) See for example: Burgoyne, John, (1989) *Management Education and Development*, 20, 1, 56-61; Ian Cunningham in "Bridging the gap between academia and industry", *Guardian*, 11-2-91

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