

Creating Cultures of Enhancement: Programme Leader or Programme Manager?

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Research in the field of quality enhancement in higher education has explored everything from defining and deconstructing the concept of quality cultures to assessing the structures of these cultures from both academic and practitioner points of view (Harvey, 2009; Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; SHEEC, 2010; Vlăsceanu, Grünberg, Pârlea, & Popa, 2007; Ehlers, 2009). What is clear from the research is that this exploration into what makes a quality culture is not a 'new' thing (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008), but rather something that has existed in academic communities for years. However, focus has tended to be on the notion of quality control or (assurance) rather than quality enhancement. The most critical challenge – that of actually creating cultures of enhancement and change, has only more recently come into sharper discussion (Kottmann, Huisman, Brockerhoff, Cremonini, & Mampaey, 2016; Kleijnen, Dolmans, Willems, & Van Hout, 2013; Berings, Beerten, Hulpiau, & Verhesschen, 2011). This focus on intertwining, but distinct, interests in quality assurance and quality enhancement becomes increasingly relevant when discussing the role of Programme Leader. Indeed, such roles act as something of a lynchpin across the intersection of quality interests and play a critical role in building cultures of enhancement within their wider programme team.

Is data getting in the way?

One of the elephants in the room when it comes to leading a programme is the question of data. As we have discussed at various points in the Collaborative Clusters events, the data is often used as a justification for current practice, support to suggest changes, a gauge for student satisfaction, or a spotlight on potential issues within everything from the university as a whole right down to individual modules. It remains unclear if staff are even aware what types of data are available, or how to access them. What's more, there is little to no discussion by universities, or in the literature, that focuses on academics and how they want their data displayed and disseminated. As was noted in the roundtable at Heriot-Watt in January 2019, do we really know how staff would like to be presented with data, and if they are able to interpret the data that they *do* have? This further begs Sam Ellis's questions at the start of the Collaborative Cluster in Glasgow in February of 2019:

- How do Programme Leaders measure what's meaningful, rather than what's easy to measure, or what's already measured anyway? Is 'meaningful' different to 'important'?
- Do PLs tend to benchmark themselves against other disciplines and programmes within their own





institutions, or against their own discipline across the sector? Or a bit of both? Or is this driven by the prevailing institutional culture?

Sam went on to note that it is worth considering if the data is just a distraction from more meaningful enhancement that could/and is taking place. Are we too focused on next year's numbers and do those numbers measure a specific impact? These are questions without easy answers, but they are worth considering, especially when trying to define the role of the Programme Leader and how to best support them as they enhance their skillset in the role. The creation of a culture depends on whether the data is being used in meaningful and responsible ways.

Programme Leaders or Programme Managers?

In light of the discussions around navigating the data landscape and the ill-defined role of the Programme Leader (see Haddow, 2019), it is important for us to start to consider what we really want the role of the Programme Leader to be. That led us to one of the central questions of the event in Glasgow:

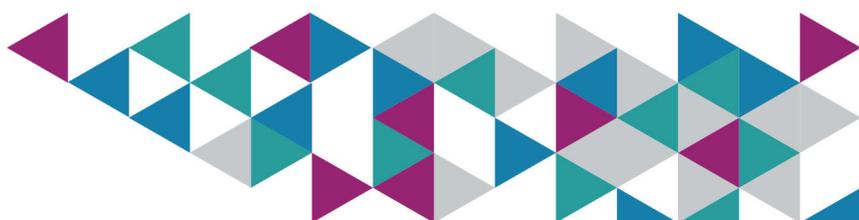
Are Programme Leaders meant to be leaders or managers?

The answer to this question may have a significant bearing on the cultures of individual programme teams. The role of the Programme Leader has been described as being filled by (*italics added*):

an experienced academic and/or senior practitioner responsible for the day-to-day *management of a particular programme* of study leading to an academic award. In a rising performative culture, the programme leader role is the key to the quality and enhancement of student learning. Such a role is also critical in *managing the practical and emotional difficulties* of staff and students associated with programme delivery. (Cahill, Bowyer, Rendell, Hammond, & Korek, 2015)

The Programme Leader is the person who has procedural oversight of the programme, procedures which may have a considerable impact upon NSS scores and student satisfaction. It is a critical, and highly complex role. What is starting to come through the discussions during cluster events is the description of the role of a Programme Leader is that the role has been taken over by administrative work; that the Programme Leader has now become a data manager, and the chief accountability officer for students, staff, and the university executive. Many Programme Leaders report being so busy with administrative tasks that they 'just keep their heads down and get on with the job'. The managerial aspect of being a Programme Leader does not engender a large degree of job satisfaction and can be a major deterrent for those wishing (or being forced) to step into the role (Whitchurch, 2013). While there is nothing inherently wrong with taking on the role of a manager, it does not seem to be the type of role desired by those working in academic roles.

It is quite possible to imagine Programme Leaders "acting as a source of inspiration, guidance, support and direction" (Bolden, et al, 2012, p. 42). In this vision of the role, the Programme Leader is not confused about the remit of their role (McLeod, 2010), and can create an environment that allows their colleagues to work together in programme teams to enhance the student experience. This is the element of the role that could allow Programme Leaders the space to discuss both good practice and failures without the fear of reproach and punishment, but rather, a chance for reflection and further learning.





The real team vs. the pseudo team

But how do we create this seemingly mythical type of environment? Rowena Senior joined the cluster for the day to help us investigate one way that we can create a strong programme team. She wanted the group to look at our existing organisational structure to determine if the teams we are working in are ‘real’ teams or ‘pseudo’ teams. Real teams are described by Richardson (2010 as cited by West & Lyubovnikova, 2012) as:

a group of people working together in an organization who are recognized as a team; who are committed to achieving team-level objectives upon which they agree; who have to work closely and interdependently in order to achieve those objectives; whose members are clear about their specified roles within the team and have the necessary autonomy to decide how to carry out team tasks; and who communicate regularly as a team in order to regulate team processes. (p. 26).

Richardson (2010 as cited by West & Lyubovnikova, 2012) goes onto describe a pseudo team:

a group of people working in an organization who call themselves or are called by others a team; who have differing accounts of team objectives; whose typical tasks require team members to work alone or in separate dyads towards disparate goals; whose team boundaries are highly permeable with individuals being uncertain over who is a team member, and who is not; and/or who, when they meet, may exchange information but without consequent shared efforts towards innovation. (p. 26)

As Rowena noted, Richardson (2010) provides four categories to consider when trying to categorise the team dynamics. They are shared objectives, interdependence, reflexivity, and boundedness. **Table 1** breaks down what makes a real team versus a pseudo team in relation to the four essential categories.

Table 1: Real Team vs. Pseudo Team as Described in Four Essential Characteristics

REAL / PSEUDO CHARACTERISTICS		
Clear, shared and agreed upon team objectives	SHARED OBJECTIVES	Many different accounts of team objectives
Work in close/coordinated manner toward common goals	INTERDEPENDENCE	Work alone, separate teams, dyads, disparate goals
Team performance is reviewed and adapted	REFLEXIVITY	Occasional meetings but more habitual than productive
Members are clear on who the team comprises of	BOUNDEDNESS	Lack of clarity regarding who makes up the team

(Richardson (2010) as shared by Rowena Senior at Collaborative Cluster Roundtable, February 2019)





What these four characteristics do is highlight that while many programmes may feel like they work as a team, they may simply adopt a managerial definition that operationalises them. Research has suggested that many people accept that there is a team in place, without any criteria to make that determination (West & Lyubovnikova, 2012). This acceptance of a managerial definition can mimic the notion of a 'real' team without being one. It is essential that Programme Leaders have the time and space to sit with their team and use the four characteristics as guidelines to 1) get a clear picture of the team as it currently stands and 2) help create the desired team structure.



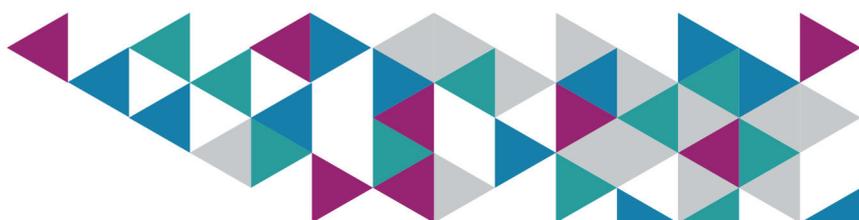
It is also important to consider what the role of the team needs/wants to be because this can mean moving away from such strict categories as 'real' team and 'pseudo' team. Reeves et al (2018) offer some broader categories that also can also be considered when structuring a programme team. These categories are:

- **Interprofessional teamwork:** this closely mirrors the real team, with team tasks commonly regarded as complex, urgent, and a shared responsibility. There is shared accountability of tasks and clear roles/goals for members of the team.
- **Interprofessional collaboration:** a loose version of teamwork, shared identity and integration of the teams is not as important, nor are tasks seen as urgent as with the characteristic above. There is shared accountability of tasks, and clear roles/goals for members of the team.
- **Interprofessional coordination:** similar to the collaboration in terms of shared identity, but interdependence and integration are not as important. Accountability and clear roles/goals are helpful, but not essential.
- **Interprofessional networks:** This is the most relaxed version of the team structure. Team members do not necessarily need to meet face-to-face, but communicate through video conferencing, emails or other forms of technology. This category still has a shared identity and shared goals, but the tasks are less urgent and complex.

Recommendations for creating a culture of enhancement

What follows are some practical suggestions for Programme Leaders, or any member of the programme teams who wish to promote a culture of enhancement within their programme. The recommendations are meant to help Programme Leaders start to think about their role as either a leader or a manager, and what Programme Leaders can do to build their ideal team.

- It is important for the Programme Leader to have a clear vision of the type of team they wish to create. One of the drawbacks to the discussion of 'real' teams and 'pseudo' teams is that thinking about teams in this way creates a duality as one vs. the other, good vs. bad. Rather than go straight for the creation of a team that is solely focused on shared goals and completely enmeshed identity, it is worth taking a step back and talking with staff about the type of team that would work best for the programme.





Reeves et al. (2018) offer some characteristics of collaborative working that might be a useful starting point for the types of work that can be done by the group.

- Programme Leaders and their teams need to acknowledge that the process of creating a team takes time, and that's not a bad thing. Academic workloads and the growing pressure for high quality publications do not leave staff a lot of free time to spend in meetings and building the foundations of a team. Despite that, it is important to carve out time to meet with the team and engage in discussions and participate in the process.
- Create a space that allows for the discussion of failures. This doesn't mean laying blame, or singling one person out to humiliate them, but rather focusing on what can be learned from the failure, and what can be done moving forward.
- Remember to celebrate success. All too often team meetings are focused on the negative, what needs to improve. It can be easy to overlook the good practice in the programme when the focus is more often than not geared toward what needs to improve, but it is important to recognise the good, and be able to share that with others in the team.

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