Improving the Quality
of Placements
Professor Michael Eraut

Conceptual Framework

Based on four tools from the author's recent longitudinal study (1st three years) of the Early Career Learning at Work of accountants, engineers and nurses. These are:

- an epistemology of practice and its implications
- a typology of modes of learning
- a typology of learning trajectories (holistic and longitudinal approach)
- a two-triangle model of factors affecting learning and their mutual interaction

Next Step

To use these tools to help students on placements:

- to understand their work environments and reflect on their experiences

- to consider their learning goals

- to ascertain learning opportunities

- to develop possible ways of accessing these opportunities directly, or through helpful intermediaries

- to handle negative experiences.

Work Processes with learning as a by-product

Participation in group processes

Working alongside others

Consultation

Tackling challenging tasks and roles

Problem solving

Trying things out

Consolidating, extending and refining skills

Working with clients

Working alongside others allows students

- to observe and listen to others at work
- to participate in shared activities
- to learn new practices and perspectives
- to become aware of different kinds of knowledge and expertise
- to gain some sense of other people's tacit knowledge.

This mode of learning is important for acquiring the tacit knowledge that underpins routines and intuitive decisions and is difficult to explain

Personal Agency

Colleagues take many practices and features of their workplace for granted.

A few students might just settle for general familiarity with the "world of work", when more could be achieved.

Hence the *personal agency* of placement students is often crucial for finding out:

- What skills and situational understandings they might need?

- How best they might access them, either directly or through their supervisors?

- Whether there are informal mentors who are prepared to offer help?

Factors affecting learning in the workplace # 1

Challenge and value of the work
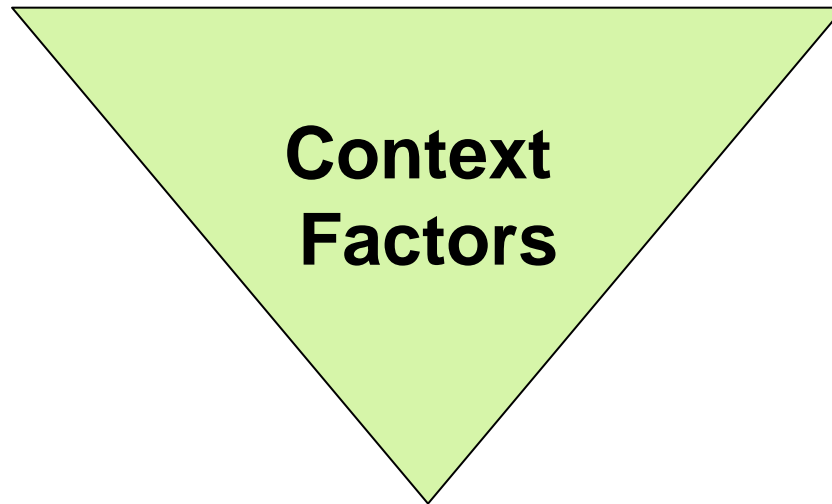
Feedback and support
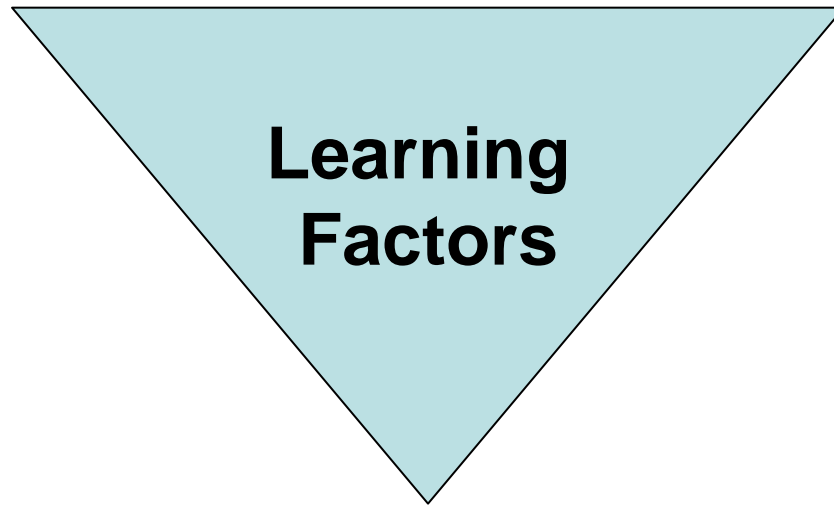
Learning Factors

Confidence and commitment
Personal agency and motivation

Factors affecting learning in the workplace # 2

Allocation and structuring of work

Encounters and relationships with people at work

Context Factors

Individual participation and expectations of their performance and progress

Illustrative Groups of Trajectories

Task performance

Role performance

Awareness and understanding

Personal development

Teamwork

Academic knowledge and skills

Decision making and problem solving

Judgement

Student data 2008-9

A substantial on-line questionnaire was sent to all placement students in February 2009, and completed by 127 students (21%) by March 9th.

The analysis presented today describes variations between questions, between faculties and between departments. The Surrey faculties are:

Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences (AH, N=41)

Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences (EP, N=41)

Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences (HM, N=17)

Faculty of Management and Law (ML, N=28)

List of Tables

6 Work Activities: Perceived Importance and Frequency

7a Quality of Placements

7b Impact on Career Outcomes

8a Placement Support for Learning Tasks

8b Placement Support for Project Work and Roles

10a Personal Agency: Exploring situations

10b Personal Agency: Seeking what you want

11a University support: from returning students, and in choosing placements

11b University Support: before and during their students' placements

Work activities: Medium & high (3+4) ratings (N=121-2)

Activity	Frequency			Importance		
Taking the initiative		**86**			**95**	
Develop relationships		**81**			**94**	
Problem solving	ML63	**79**			**93**	
Information searches		**<u>76</u>**			**<u>71</u>**	HM88
Trouble shooting		**70**			**81**	
Group work	ML48	**62**			**82**	
Quality assurance	AH49	**61**			**71**	
Administration	HM 35	**<u>55</u>**	ML74	EP34	**<u>48</u>**	ML61
	EP42					
Managing people	ML15	**<u>27</u>**	AH35	HM53	**<u>71</u>**	ML85
	HM18					

Work activities: Medium & high (3+4) ratings (N=121-2)

Activity	Frequency	Importance
Evaluating projects, reports, or proposals	66	88
Evaluating situations or opportunities	58	89
Research aimed at publication or report	53	65 HM82
Research to develop a product or design	ML22 42 EP61	54 EP78
Entrepreneurship	HM12,EP17 26	HM35 48 ML65
Marketing	HM6,EP7 21 ML41	EP,HM24 34 ML65
Finance	HM0 19 ML41	HM24 46 ML65

Student Views of Placement Quality

N=124 (1-5 scale)	Quite good & V Good			Very Good		
Quality relationships		**81**		36ML	**50**	
Access to expertise	65ML	**80**		36ML	**51**	61EP
Supervision		**78**			**45**	59HM
Informal support	58ML	**74**	89HM	<u>29ML</u>	**43**	<u>65HM</u>
Challenging opportunities		**71**			**39**	53HM
Allocation of appropriate work	<u>53ML</u>	**70**	<u>88HM</u>	21ML	**31**	
Opportunities to be creative		**61**		22EP	**29**	35HM

Student views of Career Outcomes

Self Knowledge N=124	Quite High & V High (4+5)			Very High (5)		
Awareness of your strengths and potential		**81**		15AH	**24**	41HM
Awareness of what you need to achieve in your final year		**78**		32ML	**41**	
Quality of what you achieved in your placement		**74**			**29**	5HM
Awareness of the kind of work you want to do in the future	50ML	**62**	AH77	24EP	**29**	41HM
Awareness of the work you do not want to do in the future	47HM	**58**		15HM	**24**	32ML

Support for Learning Tasks

Type of Support N=117-8	OK & Great (3+4)	Great (4)		
To what extent has the choice of tasks given you enough scope for progression in:				
taking responsibility for tasks?	**87**	32EP	**45**	69HM
your range of assigned tasks?	**79**		**35**	46HM
task difficulty?	**77**			
How much have you learned from: consulting others?	**90** **76** 94HM	60ML	**66**	88HM
sharing tasks with others?		27ML	**41**	71HM
How much help have you had in learning your assigned tasks?	**82**		**49**	71HM

Support for Project Work

N=119	OK & Great (3+4)	Great (4)
To what extent have you been challenged by Project Work?	77 94HM	31ML **43**
How much responsibility have you been given in project work?	62ML **78** 100HM	27ML **44** 59HM
To what extent has participation in projects helped you to learn:		
The content of the project?	**88**	31ML **54** 76HM
New skills?	**88**	42ML **54** 71HM
How to work with other people on a focused piece of work?	**77** 94HM	32ML **42** 65HM
How to handle uncertainty?	**74**	24ML **38** 47HM
How to keep to deadlines?	**81**	**46**

Responsible Roles

Support for these responsible roles	OK plus Great (3+4)	Great (4)
Develop initiatives or projects	**68**	**35**
Monitor progress	**73**	**31**
Evaluate outcomes	**64**	**26**
Manage people	24HM **36** 46ML	4ML **15**

Personal Initiatives: exploring situations

Have you asked?	No need	Not tried	Yes, no success	Yes, success
To visit other sections, sites or departments?	22	20	11	47
About different kinds of work?	14	8	3	76
For an introduction to a potential helper?	22	33	39	3
For feedback on your work?	3	27	4	66
To be given new tasks in your current load?	12	15	9	65

Personal Initiatives: seeking what you want

Have you asked?	No need	Not tried	Yes, no success	Yes- success
To move to a different section or department	52	27	11	11
To work with a different person or group	34	24	9	33
To work on a particular project	21	26	9	44
To be given more responsibility	25	28	6	41
Others to back any of your initiatives	24	25	9	42

Have you asked for more responsibility?

Department/ Faculty	No Need	Not Tried	Yes, no success	Yes, success
Music, Sound Recording, Dance	0	29	0	<u>71</u>
Politics, Sociology, Economics	<u>33</u>	33	0	33
Psychology	27	13	7	<u>53</u>
Civil, Chem & Env Engineering	22	<u>44</u>	0	33
Computing	25	<u>37</u>	<u>12</u>	25
Electronic Engineering	17	33	<u>17</u>	33
Maths & Physics	20	20	0	20
Mechanical & Aero Engineering	<u>30</u>	30	<u>10</u>	20
Biochemistry	<u>33</u>	0	0	<u>67</u>
Microbial & Nutritional Science	<u>56</u>	0	0	0
Law	20	20	0	<u>60</u>
Management	17	28	<u>11</u>	44
Whole Sample	**25**	**28**	**6**	41

Preparation before your placement

Opportunities to meet returning students:	None	Little	Quite good	Very good
In your own subject	20	32	29	18
From organisations that interest you	25	35	29	12
From particular parts of an organisation.	39	28	25	8
Choice of Placements				
Understanding the advantages of placements	2	10	49	40
Help in deciding on the kind of placement you want	6	28	44	22
Help in finding a placement	6	25	28	40

Support from Visiting Tutors

Department	none	little	quite good	very good
Music, Sound Recording, Dance	0	14	43	43
Politics, Sociology, Economics	17	17	50	17
Psychology	13	53	20	13
Civil, Chem & Env Engineering	0	11	55	33
Computing	0	25	37	37
Electronic Engineering	0	0	67	33
Maths & Physics	0	20	40	40
Mechanical & Aero Engineering	0	30	30	40
Biochemistry	0	17	33	50
Microbial & Nutritional Science	11	22	34	22
Law	40	20	0	40
Management	0	41	35	24
Whole Sample	**6**	**27**	**37**	**30**

University support for placements

Support before and during placements	None	Little	Quite good	Very good
General briefings on placements	2	16	<u>60</u>	23
Seminars focused on the nature and quality of placement learning	7	25	<u>53</u>	15
The work of the careers' service	24	22	<u>41</u>	13
Advice from administrative staff	15	32	<u>40</u>	13
Through visiting tutors	6	27	<u>37</u>	30
Through contacts with other staff	28	<u>31</u>	26	15
Through discussing your placement report(s)	24	<u>34</u>	28	14

How do we use this data?

Warnings

The response rate was only 21%, and there were small groups from most departments

We cannot assume that subjects with similar experiences will make the same responses to the same question

Actions

All three parties (students, tutors and their departments, employers) can benefit from sharing their own possible interpretations of this data

Data should be treated not as absolute facts but as mediating artefacts which enable mutual engagements between the relevant people

The instrument could be developed in a variety of ways for particular contexts. Its prime purpose is to open up placement learning for greater scrutiny and to suggest ideas for students, university staff and employers to consider when they take on responsibilities for learning in the workplace