

Improving the Quality of Placements

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Conceptual Framework

This is 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

Towards an epistemology of practice

Four distinct but interconnected *elements of professional practice*:

- 1) **Assessing clients and/or situations**, sometimes briefly, sometimes involving a long process of investigation and consultation
- 2) **Deciding what, if any, action to take**, both immediately and over a longer period (either on one's own or as a leader or member of a team); sequences of small decisions more common than large decisions
- 3) **Pursuing an agreed course of action**, modifying, consulting and reassessing as and when necessary
- 4) **Metacognitive monitoring** of oneself, people needing attention and the general progress of the case, problem, project or situation; and sometimes also learning through reflection on the experience.

Interactions between Time, Mode of Cognition and Type of Process

Type of Process	Mode of Cognition		
	Instant/Reflex	Rapid/Intuitive	Deliberative/Analytic
Assessment of the situation	Pattern recognition	Rapid interpretation Communication on the spot	Prolonged diagnosis Review, discussion and analysis
Decision making	Instant response	Recognition primed or intuitive	Deliberative analysis or discussion
Overt actions	Routinised actions	Routines punctuated by rapid decisions	Planned actions with periodic progress reviews
Metacognitive engagement	Situational awareness	Implicit monitoring Short, reactive Reflections	Monitoring of thought and activity, reflective learning Group evaluation

Situational Understanding is acquired through:

Tacit acculturation
Multiple conversations

Reflection on experience
Access to concepts and theories

Assessment of a situation can be jeopardised by:

taken for granted assumptions
preconceptions
misunderstandings

limited access to people and information
limited relationships (quality and number)
poverty of local discourse

and improved by:

use of research-type skills
questioning

recognition of previous experiences
consultation and engagement with others

A Typology of Learning Modes

<i>Work Processes with learning as a by-product</i>	<i>Agentic Activities located within work or learning processes</i>	<i>Learning Processes at or near the workplace</i>
<i>Participation in group processes</i> <i>Working alongside others</i> <i>Consultation</i> <i>Working with clients</i> Tackling challenging tasks and roles Problem solving Trying things out Consolidating, extending and refining skills	Asking questions Getting information Locating resource people Listening and observing Reflecting Learning from mistakes Giving and receiving feedback Use of mediating artefacts	Being supervised Being coached Being mentored Shadowing Visiting other sites Conferences Short courses Working for a qualification Independent study

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.

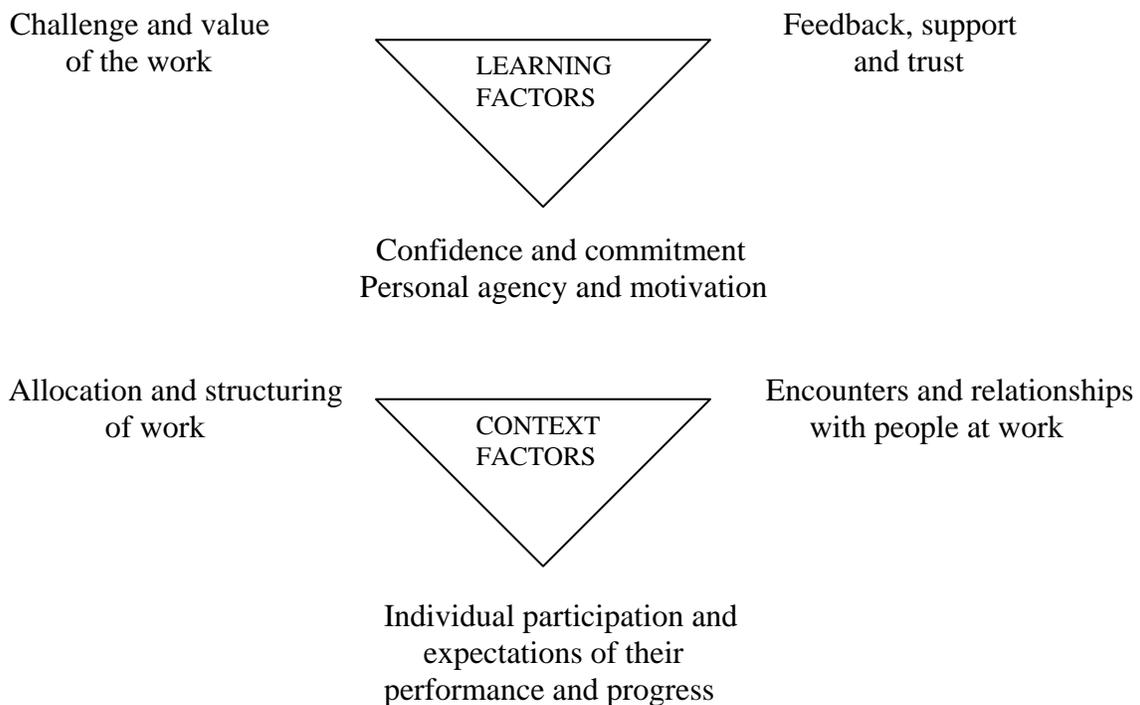
Personal agency

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 at work: the Two Triangle Model



The allocation of work and the contexts in which it is situated are crucial to an effective placement, because they encompass the need for challenging work and relationships which both support those challenges and provide appropriate feedback.

Eraut M (2007) Learning from Other People in the Workplace, *Oxford Review of Education*, 33 (4), 403-422

Eraut M (2009) *The Role of Employers in Professional Learning*, AERA conference, San Diego, April 2009

A Typology of Learning Trajectories

<p>Task Performance</p> <p>Speed and fluency Complexity of tasks and problems Range of skills required Communication with a wide range of people Collaborative work</p> <p>Awareness and Understanding</p> <p>Other people: colleagues, customers, managers, etc. Contexts and situations One's own organization Problems and risks Priorities and strategic issues Value issues</p> <p>Personal Development</p> <p>Self evaluation Self management Handling emotions Building and sustaining relationships Disposition to attend to other perspectives Disposition to consult and work with others Disposition to learn and improve one's practice Accessing relevant knowledge and expertise Ability to learn from experience</p> <p>Teamwork</p> <p>Collaborative work Facilitating social relations Joint planning and problem solving Ability to engage in and promote mutual learning</p>	<p>Role Performance</p> <p>Prioritisation Range of responsibility Supporting other people's learning Leadership Accountability Supervisory role Delegation Handling ethical issues Coping with unexpected problems Crisis management Keeping up-to-date</p> <p>Academic Knowledge and Skills</p> <p>Use of evidence and argument Accessing formal knowledge Research-based practice Theoretical thinking Knowing what you might need to know Using knowledge resources (human, paper-based, electronic) Learning how to use relevant theory (in a range of practical situations)</p> <p>Decision Making and Problem Solving</p> <p>When to seek expert help Dealing with complexity Group decision making Problem analysis Generating, formulating and evaluating options Managing the process within an appropriate timescale Decision making under pressure</p> <p>Judgement</p> <p>Quality of performance, output and outcomes Priorities Value issues Levels of risk</p>
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A Socially Situated Definition of Competence

Competence is the ability to perform the tasks and roles required to the expected standard

- Applies to any career stage
- Expected standard will vary with experience and responsibility
- Takes into account lifelong learning and changes in “good practice”
- Influenced by external standards and/or internal micro-politics

Evidence of competence is determined by a series of performances, each of which needs to be situated in terms of its context, the prevailing conditions and the situations being addressed.

Arguments for Learning Trajectories

- To improved the representation of Personal Knowledge
- To incorporates the principles and practices of Lifelong Learning
- To recognize that Current Capabilities cannot be matched to Qualifications
- To take into account:
 - Changes in context
 - Variations in practices
 - Changes in practices
- To includes both Formal and Informal Learning
- To ease the unreasonable burden placed on criterion-based assessment

Trajectory Points as Windows on Episodes that address the Part-Whole problem

Each point on each trajectory can be treated as a window on a performance episode involving expertise from that trajectory and other associated trajectories.

- Opening the window should reveal:
- the context and conditions at the time
 - the other types of expertise involved
 - the cluster of episodes from which the example was taken
 - any differences from previously recorded episodes
 - indicators of expertise in the domain of the trajectory having been maintained, widened or enhanced

My role at Surrey

To engage with staff and students 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.

Current ways of improving the quality of placements

- Pre-placement activities in the university
- Post-placement activities in the university
- Student to student sharing of issues, experiences and helpful contacts at work (especially when one student follows another in the same employment setting)
- Documents for students, university supervisors and employer supervisors
- Training supervisors, informal or formal
- Direct engagement with employers

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

Faculty data

Phase 1 involved analysing documents and interviewing faculty responsible for placements in 12 different subjects. This led to two reports:

1. The norms and variations in current practice described by the interview data
2. A review of relevant literature on work-based learning.

Phase 2 involved collecting data from students in three ways

Student data 2007-8

1. SCEPTRe launched a competition for students returning from placements in September 2008, in which they were asked to write an account of their placement on the theme of *Learning to be Professional*. 28 accounts were provided and are analysed by Lori Riley in another conference paper
2. 8 authors volunteered to be interviewed by Eraut, to clarify and amplify significant aspects of their experience and to discuss the roles of those who most influenced their learning opportunities for good or ill

Student data 2008-9

3. A substantial on-line questionnaire was sent to all placement students in February 2009, and completed by 127 students by March 9th. A preliminary analysis is presented, which describes the variations between responses between faculties and between individual students. The four Surrey faculties are:
 - Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences (AHS, N=41)
 - Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences (EPS, N=41)
 - Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences (HMS, N=17)
 - Faculty of Management and Law (ML, N=28)