Becoming a manager in a contact centre:
"it's not rocket science is it?"

INTRODUCTION

First line managers (FLMs) are of particular interest to organisational researchers because they act as a pivotal link between senior management and operational staff. Their role has been subject to continuing professional body interest (CIPD 2003a, 2007) and numerous practitioner texts that attempt to define practice in a prescriptive way (see for example Templar, 2005; Watson et al., 2007). These writings, together with curricula from Business Schools suggest that the FLM role exists to translate strategy and policy into practice, respond to change, and to lead and direct their support staff. Corporate People Management policies and strategies are generally devolved to line managers (CIPD, 2009) although it should be recognised there can be inconsistencies in how such duties are discharged (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Watson & Harris, 1999). Line managers have the potential to be the weak link between worthy Human Resource policy and a poor reality. Some studies have queried the nature of the management role and whether it can be analysed in a way that leads to generalised prescriptions (Mintzberg, 1973; Stewart, 1999; Watson, 1994). However, if the role in a specific context is clearly defined through job descriptions and person specifications, it is arguably very learnable. This presents challenges for what and how an individual learns to become a manager.

Moving into a management position can be a difficult transition for individuals. In learning to perform their new role, they arrive with some knowledge and observations about management. They do not start as *tabulae rasae,* an assumption made by Lave and Wenger (1991), but with experiences of being managed, and a disposition to learning (Fuller et al., 2005). Situated learning theory, proposed by Lave & Wenger (1991) contributes to understanding this 'becoming' by offering the idea that learning starts with apprenticeship and through 'communities of practice', individuals gain mastery; newcomers become old-timers. However, the writers do not provide an examination of the processes of the journey from apprentice to master, and this requires further understanding and clarity. The process of how individuals learn to become managers has been subject to increasing interest (Bryans & Mavin, 2003; Rees & Porter, 2005; Bergen, 2009) and this has been linked to the development of identity (Watson, 2001; Reedy, 2009).

Research into how individuals become managers has tended to look at management in a general sense (Hill, 1992; Storey, Edwards & Sisson, 1997; Watson and Harris, 1999; Watson, 2001; Reedy, 2009). Whilst these important studies have contributed to general understanding, there remain difficulties in applying management concepts in different contexts due to the problematic nature of learning transfer (see Holton et al., 2000; Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Hodkinson et al. 2007). This limits understanding of how learning to become a manager occurs to specific situations. Conceptions of management learning need to be examined therefore in a context that is *sui generis.* Although the data reveal aspects of

manager activities and the workplace environment, the focus of this paper is the early findings about learning to become a First Line Managers (FLM) in one UK call centre (CC) – a public / private sector joint venture, to be referred to as City Access. The paper concludes with questions for senior managers in organisations to consider about the recruitment, selection and development of FLMs.

BACKGROUND

City Access provides a range of frontline and infrastructure services to Local Authorities and employs staff either directly, or seconded from the client organisation. It provides formal management development and education, but has neither investigated nor formalised its approach to experiential learning or learning at work, perhaps due to this being largely incidental and perceived as difficult to manage and control (Garrick, 1999). CCs are stimulating arenas to study, as they are a relatively new and growing industry sector in the public sector and moving towards maturity in the private sector. They are high intensity work environments, yet unlike others, for example an accident and emergency facility in a hospital, CCs are often characterised by low level work complexity, low level skill needs as they are driven by technology, and high staff turnover as staff commitment is generally low. Growth of CCs in the United Kingdom may be accelerated as some companies reconsider off-shoring strategies and return services to the UK due to customer dissatisfaction (Jobsincustomerservice, 2010). Although CCs are of increasing interest to the academic community, much of that interest is concentrated on the use of information technologies, process services and marketing, management of staff issue, and performance management. Manager learning in this context has not been widely explored, perhaps because assumptions have been made that the work in such contexts is of a routine nature, regimented by controlling technologies that in turn leads to an impression that managerial work here is not very sophisticated. This ethnographic project queries such assumptions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I argue that HRD practice generally has been dominated by a positivist paradigm that seeks to establish clear links from the sum of individual experiences to organisationally valued performance (CIPD, 2003b; Mabey, 2005). Literature in the main focuses on a single perspective, the employer, who provides, commissions or supports training (and occasionally education) almost as a commodity. A positivist stance, based on a realist ontology, assumes that phenomena exist independently of human experience; there is an 'out there' reality. This stance gives rise to two tensions. First, a naïve assumption that learning solely for performance is a good thing *per se*, and a second circumspect view, certainly from a learner's perspective, that there is an implied threat arising from a failure to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes. Inability to perform a job role by not learning the job could result in dismissal – a logical step from viewing HRD as part of the performance management system that includes a disciplinary procedure. This is consistent with a 'hard'

approach to human resource management (Storey, 1989) with "managers exercising 'sovereign' disciplinary power" (Valentin, 2006, p.21). It can be argued that in a positivist paradigm that the development of individuals is an instrumental process to support performance outputs and reinforces organisational power and control.

With the emergence of writings in critical Human Resource Development (Rigg, Stewart & Trehan, 2007), there is growing disillusionment with the positivist paradigm and its links with performance and measurement, an issue recognised by Yeo, "because the process of learning is volatile and that knowledge acquisition occurs at several levels, any attempt to measure intangibles can be problematic" (2003, p. 71). Further, the assumption that there is a causal link between HRD activity and organisational performance is problematic. Individual workers through their agency, the capacity to exercise personal choice, have a range of different values and expectations that inform their motivations, their free will. Employers ought not therefore to expect consistent behaviour in patterned ways. In terms of development, each will have unique experiences of prior learning and a distinct capacity to develop, discrete threshold levels of competence, and singular opportunities to consolidate any new knowledge and skills to recreate knowledge from other contexts.

My ontological stance counters the hegemonic managerial, positivist position about learning being 'banked' by trainees for subsequent application, as I have sympathy with the views of Jarvis et al (2003) that learning is "the process by which we internalize the external world and through which we construct our experiences of that world (2003, p,x) I maintain that analysis of quantitative data produced via methodologies from the natural sciences is inappropriate for the study human subjects (people) in this project, principally for two reasons. Firstly, such approaches do not recognise that individuals in a social setting are fundamentally different from research objects in the natural sciences, and secondly my wish to expose unique personal histories in the stages of becoming a FLM will not be achieved by imposing a scientifically constructed world on my participants (Bryman, 1988). Interpretive approaches privilege an exploration of learning by practitioners from their standpoint rather than an employer's.

I justify the use of a qualitative abductive research strategy (sometimes referred to as retroduction) as it draws on Peirce's theories on approbation (1934) and knowledge produced in the course of application (Gibbons et al., 1994, Gold et al., 2010). In this convention, data is analysed against theory to reach truth as 'unfolding', an *Enfaltung* (Hegel, in Pinkard, 2005). Through iterations of data analysis, 'the story' is gradually revealed. When interpretation of data matches the researcher's lived experiences, findings can be assumed through intentional fulfilment against competing claims for truth (Sanderberg, 2005). This is consistent with an interpretivist approach, which recognises that the world is composed of multiple realities. This has similar origins to grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) but in this convention meaning is grounded in the data more broadly than just social actors' accounts of their everyday lives. As mid-range theorising, the

study will not lead to broad generalisations, but a questioning of existing practices in the management of FLMs.

To further illuminate how individuals learn to become a manager, I argue it is helpful to explore the use of metaphors for learning given its intangible and conceptual nature. Different writers have explored a range of metaphors; as acquisition, the gathering of facts (Sfard, 1992; Mager, 1992); as knowledge creation, creating relevant knowledge in a context (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2003); as participation in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, op.cit); and finally as becoming (Colley et al., 2003), a recognition of the evolving and dynamic nature of learning. However, knowledge is not a reification, a commodity that can be transferred between contexts (Haskell, 2001). Hodkinson (2007) reminds us that "it's people who move, stupid", suggesting the limited utility of knowledge that is relevant in one context in another.

In sum, my research adopts an idealist ontology that regards "constructions of reality as just different ways of perceiving and making sense of an external world" (Blaikie, 2007, p.17).

RESEARCH DESIGN

An invitation was extended to all 22 FLMs in City Access to attend a briefing session to introduce the project and seek their involvement. Each was given a participant information sheet that summarised the project and they had the opportunity to ask questions. Twelve FLMs (with an equal gender split) agreed to participate in the study and signed a consent form. Each then completed a short questionnaire to gather ontogenic data and also to reveal their motivations and influences for wanting the FLM role, their feelings about being a manager, and experiences of making the transition from an adviser. This was intended to prepare the participants for later interviews by encouraging reflection on their practice rather than challenging them to recall events during the interview without adequate warning and preparation.

Participant observation enabled data gathering about both actual practice and workplace affordances (Gibson, 1977), which, according to Billet (2002, p.460), provide opportunities that "include the kinds of activities individuals are able to engage in and the kinds of guidance they can access through these experiences". These processes that *afford* or not learning might privilege or constrain FLMs' becoming (Morgan, 1997; Billet, 2001). Each FLM was observed for half a day conducting their normal duties supervising and advising call advisers. One adviser permitted me to observe a performance review discussion with an adviser. Notes were taken of what and how the job was done and at the conclusion of each observation, the notes were discussed with the FLM and the discussion was recorded and subsequently transcribed.

Finally, each FLM participated in a semi-structured interview to use their "practical reasoning and the ways in which they make the social world sensible to themselves as the central focus" (Bryman, 2001, p.53). The interviews ranged from one hour 50 minutes to one hour. Most were conducted in a private room away from the call advisers, but one participant wished to be interviewed off the premises in a public coffee shop. Each interview was personally transcribed using voice recognition software and sent to the participants to ensure that the detail was accurate and reflected views expressed. None of the FLMs wished to alter the detail in the transcription.

The research design therefore explored individual stories of becoming and sense making of the FLM role to generate rich data for thick descriptive analysis (Geertz, 1973). It may be argued that using three methods was taking 'a sledgehammer to crack a nut', suggesting a lack of researcher confidence. However, capturing data by a single method may, according to Miller and Glasner lead to little more than "the repetition of familiar cultural tales" (2004, p.125), and limit the potential to explore participants' experiences and uncover meaning. Additional methods enabled the FLMs' accounts of becoming to be viewed socially, in terms of interpersonal relationships, as well as sociologically, reflecting their biographies and, as mentioned, an abductive research strategy requires more than just actors' accounts of reality. Using the three methods adds to the fine grain of the data to reveal a richer account of becoming in the given context and counters the dangers of not challenging assumptions about the perceived unproblematic nature of the FLM role in CC context, an issue identified in the introduction to this paper. Bennis and O'Toole (2005) assert that researchers in the social sciences should have confidence in their research stance without the need for 'physics envy' (p.98) and hard data.

EARLY FINDINGS

In this section I shall outline the nature of the management role in this context and discuss personal attributes needed to perform the role.

The research participants have widely differing backgrounds in work experience and educational attainment. Half of the cohort, hold Bachelor degrees; of the others, one has an A level standard qualification and the remainder have GCSEs. Some have experience gained from doing the adviser role and have come to be regarded for their expert knowledge, whilst others have worked as team managers in other centres. The prime research question for the project is how do individuals become managers in a specific contact centre. When asked about management and learning the job of a FLM, one participant commented:

> *"My wages are 28 grand for sitting in an office with other people. Come on, it's not rocket science is it? It is money for old rope isn't it? I come in, do my job, get the wonga, go the Maldives . . . happy days."* Christine

This raises a question: if "it" is not "rocket science", what is it, which justifies the questioning of assumptions about management activities and practice raised earlier. The data suggest that the job purpose is to support call advisers (CAs) who provide advice and guidance to the public. FLMs answer CA queries, coach and develop them by listening in to their conversations, both in real time and from recordings, agree specific work targets and plan their ongoing development. Given these tasks, what do the data reveal about learning to become a manager?

The process of coding the data from the four sources, questionnaire, observation notes, observation discussion and interview, has commence using template analysis (King, 2004). In doing so, I was mindful of advice from Sandelowski that "any framework for analysis must ultimately be data-derived, or must earn its way into the study by virtue of its fit with the faithfulness of the data" 1995, p.375). King draws on the work of Madill et al (2000) to suggest that in a contextualist constructivist position, a researcher's reflexivity is important as "there are always multiple interpretations to be made of any phenomenon" (2004, p.256). The process of coding produced descriptive codes (Miles and Huberman, 1994) to attach labels to the data and establish themes. This would then be the basis for more detailed analysis to consider data essences (Giorgi, 1997).

What is the role?
When discussing what she does, one participant, Christine commented "it's not rocket science", which raises a question about what exactly does the role require. In this context, FLMs have very limited discretion about what they do and have restricted accountability. Senior managers take decisions about staff, such as granting leave and absence. This means that FLMs cover a specified range of activities dictated by the performance demands of the service that are regulated through mechanistic control. They monitor call adviser activities, making sure they arrive punctually to start their shift and act as reference points for queries from the public with which advisers struggle. The monitoring of overall service levels provided is handled by a central unit that adjusts 'skills sets' – the areas in which the advisers are proficient and experienced to ensure staff resource availability to fluctuating demand.

FLMs act as coaching supervisors to ensure the achievement of target levels of performance. Their only real area of discretion is to decide when to coach the advisers through either listening in to calls or conducting one-to-one discussions. Other studies of learning referred to earlier about becoming a manager, and indeed the experiences of three participants, have identified the manager role as encompassing a much broader range of activities. This has implications for the selection and development of FLMs in City Access, and motivation for the role (Schein, 1978).

Personal attributes

FLMs need to be resilient, shown by maintaining a positive outlook, exercising emotional control and switching off from work pressures. This is an inherent personal attribute and has been developed from three main sources - early behavioural influences, (although interestingly not about becoming a manager); general 'life experiences' and interactions with people; and actual job experiences. There are also elements of social learning in evidence (Bandura, 1977), although such experiential learnings are not covered by City Access's formal management development programmes. Life (including parenting) and job experiences are more significant to the participants in becoming a manager (Evans and Kersh, 2006).

As expected, parents and teachers have had a significant influence in the development of values and motivations which carry forward into attitudes to work. Guiding principles such as *"you can do better",* (Christine); "y*ou should work hard, you shouldn't be like a lazy person, you should be the one who gets on and does things"* (Phillip) helped the participants to develop the need for self-reliance and a sense of an independent self. Unsurprisingly, and consistent with other studies of becoming a manager (Watson & Harris, op.cit.), none of the participants from an early age aspired to be a manager. The comment from Jamie was typical:

> *It was never like, when I was 12 at school – "I know, I'll be a manager", I never dreamt of it. You don't, do you? It is not something that you as aspire to be, do you know what I mean?*

Career aspirations were typical of children based on their interests, such as school subjects or influences from television characters as below

Engineer
Air hostess
Pilot in the RAF
Professional golfer
Interior Designer
I wanted to run my own business or be a footballer
Midwife or microbiologist
RAF military policeman
Teacher
Lawyer
Civil Servant at Whitehall
Detective

Table 1 Early career aspirations

Most consider they just fell into management, it was seen as a logical career development step from having either been an adviser or, for example, working in retail. Early in their working lives there was no real sense of purpose beyond getting a good job, or a "stop gap",

mainly to satisfy the need to generate money. The unique experiences find their way into individual approaches to learning the role of a FLM.

As indicated above, early experiences have influenced the development of a distinct set of essential personal attributes. Attributes and disposition seem to be more important than knowledge. The observations in particular revealed the exercise of significant patience in conducting the role. FLMs receive numerous and continuing interruptions to their work during the day and advisers were not made to feel awkward about making an interruption. At no time during the observations did the FLMs show any form of irritation. Indeed, the request for help was met each time with a welcoming smile and attentive body language as FLMs genuinely valued the contribution of their staff

> *You have got to cope with managing interruptions in this environment -- it is a vital part of it.* Maria
> *To me that is just doing a service to a member of the public.* James
> *My team make my job one hell of a lot easier -- they really do.* Trevor

The source for this appears to be core values of respect for people whether this be co-workers or the public.

All participants found that personal confidence has been developed in performing the role, and this is linked to the need to be resilient, shown by maintaining a positive outlook and exercising emotional control (Goleman et al., 2002; Higgs, 2004). As the environment has a strong performance ethos, the FLMs' manager, the Operations Manager is constantly checking performance levels and the contributions of CAs. Arguably, the Operations Managers conform to the stereotypical perception of a contact centre as a 'dark satanic mill', a historical perspective that continues to receive attention (Edemariam, 2010). Given the FLMs' pivotal role, they do defend their team and demonstrate strong values of equity and fairness

> *I know what they are doing. I know that they are giving their all. I will fiercely protect that even if one of them has fallen off the wagon shall we say, there is usually a reason behind that.* Louise

In addition, the participants discuss a need for clear separation between work and home, to manage their stress levels and also to be clear about their image. It is important to the participants to be authentic as a person and in the role they perform.

> *I still have the same persona that I have in work, you can't afford to really have dark moods I don't think, because you are there again more as the focal point of the team.* James
> *I quite enjoy sorting things out for people, working with people whether it be the customers or my team. I am quite a social person I suppose and sorting things out for people gives you a sense of self-achievement doesn't it?* Trevor

This is an interesting area that will require significant additional analysis, as all participants either showed some defensiveness or struggled to answer the question "who are you?"

To what extent is there an overlap between the you in work and you outside? *Probably half and half I think*. So what stays outside work? *Me - I stay outside work*. And what does Me look like? *Now then, if I tell you, then . . . . .* Interview with Christine.
Who am I? . . . gosh - that is a tough one. Interview with Louise.

However, most have reached an accommodation with their lives and work, reporting that they are "in a good place".

Learning experiences

Learning to become anything is ". . . . socially guided and individually constructed in the course of human life. People are born as potential persons, the process of becoming actual persons takes place through individual transformations of social experience" (Harré, 1995, p.373). In learning to perform a new role, the participants arrived with some knowledge and observations about management, experiences of being managed, and a disposition to learning (Fuller et al., op.cit.). However, knowledge about the role may not lead to its successful performance. In any case, knowledge about management 'from the receiving end' can create impressions and expectations that may not be matched by experience of doing the role. The data reveal that participants' transformation to a FLM lead to two types of difficulty. The first is when moving from adviser to FLM. For some this has been rather traumatic:

"People were quite, I don't think resentful is the word, but people resented the fact that I had applied for the job and there was very much a sense of why has she got the job, she does not know anything about what we are doing." Susan

For others, it was a test of their resilience:

"I've thought "no, I have got a role to fulfil, let's not waste time about what people think. Do what I think is right." Lin

The second difficulty arose for one of those who joined City Access as a FLM from another organisation:

"At first I thought "bloody hell this is quite daunting. . . . Then, after I came out of my training I was fine. It was just like at my previous job when I thought "can I do this?", and "yes, I can do this". It is probably a confidence thing with me, because at first I think "can I do that?" Then once I have done it for a little bit I think "why was I worrying?"" John

In this context, the data suggest that FLMs have developed their own constructions about the management role independently of the corpus of management literature (knowledge creation metaphor). Although the participants recognise the value of formal training events for the development of initial procedural knowledge, work and life experiences of observing and being subject to management practices have had greater utility:

definitely not as important as the experiences I got from doing the job itself. Patricia

. . . go on the course and learn the phraseology and terminology but I think the day-to-day job is where you gain real experience. James
"I don't think that has anything to do with being in the workplace, I think it is just life skills" Susan
"I think my experience has made me a better team leader rather than being on a training course" Christine

This suggests that the participants use their formative experiences in the FLM role and construct a narrative in which they *adapt* to their situation, as extensions to their personal histories, and supports the idea of knowledge being individually created and socially constructed. However, there is one perceived benefit of formal training as a safety net to avoid blame

If you have not had the official training in it, you are not expected to know. Lin

Some of the FLMs socialise outside of working hours and consider their co-workers as friends more than colleagues. This helps to develop a strong sense of community of practice (participation metaphor), and encourages mutual loyalty and support that leads to sharing of knowledge, and recognition of the individual contribution that each manager has the capacity to make :

. . . . you learn from other people's ways of working. Phillip
You can only retain certain types of information, so we do help each other out. Lin
But I think all the team leaders they all have a gift, it is quite interesting to see some are really good at IT and others are good at interpersonal and others good at organising. Louise

The comment from John is particularly revealing as a summary as it suggests that in reflecting about learning, irrespective of type, it is a natural consequence of experience:

You learn, don't you, you learn.

DISCUSSION
The process of becoming a manager in this context relies heavily on the personal dispositions and attributes of the participants. Only three have participated in City Access's formal management development, although the limitations of such processes to facilitate individuals becoming managers have been recognised (Warhurst, 2009); arguably individuals learn *about* management rather than how to become a manager. The idea of learning and becoming also links closely with identity, and this requires a deeper level of analysis as it is important for this project for two main reasons. Firstly, as individuals make sense of their world, they aim to discover who they are in relation to others. In early pilot studies before field work, a typical response by a person to the invitation "tell me about yourself" produced almost exclusively responses that described a person's job role. For some individuals, their self-image *is* their occupation, which is reinforced and justified

through their work practices. In turn, individuals develop heuristics to facilitate the performance of their role, often referred to as "habitus" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 120). The development of habitus encourages practices for individuals to "become at home with themselves" (Usher et al., 1997, p. 59, in Trehan, 2001), a form of ontological security (Giddens, 1991). Secondly, some organisations have a unitary view of what a manager is required to do, articulated through performance agreement processes, competence and behavioural statements, and values. If organisations aspire to have managers who act in homogeneous ways, then where does a unique sense of self sit, or does the sense of self find an accommodation by adapting to the environment? This is of significance given the nature of some management studies that have sought to examine the extent to which an organisation shapes the identity of staff (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

Some writers attempt to elicit differences between formal and informal learning, although Colley et al., (op.cit., p.1) consider the argument sterile as "it is not possible to separate out informal/non-formal learning from formal learning in ways that have broad applicability or agreement". Learning occurs through experiences that can be acquired through participation with others (Lave & Wenger, op.cit.). The writers suggest that individuals learn by exposure to a context and through interactions with others. Implicit in their work is that learners start as *tabulae rasae* and engage in "learning trajectories, developing identities, and forms of membership" (p.36). This rather ignores the possibility for prior experience to inform current positions that has been a key feature of my data. In addition, the writers are less clear about how an individual might progress from peripheral participation to full participation, and then to mastery. They acknowledge that learning "implies becoming a different person" (p.53), a change in identity, yet the processes of identity development is not explored. The project has identified identity as an important area for analysis as individuals develop in the FLM role. This presents a key challenge to a central theme in Situated Learning Theory that individuals *change* their identity. The data indicate identifiable stages that help FLMs to 'become' that enables them to evolve into authenticity in the role, an idea that has resonance in the notion of the 'emergent' manager (Watson & Harris, op.cit.). These 'stages in becoming' will now be explored as at this stage in the project, the data suggest that the pathway to becoming a manager has four transitions, starting with the idea of a 'provisional self', then early professional, senior professional and for a restricted few the final stage of mastery.

The notion of "provisional selves" has been explored by Ibarra (1999), who suggests that people adapt to new roles by experimenting with image and identity. People undertake "trials for possible but not yet fully elaborated professional identities" (p.765). She continues by agreeing with the views of other socialization researchers that career transitions trigger identity changes, but this does not appear to have occurred in this context. The participants report great consistency in how they behave over time, reporting that they want to be perceived as professional and this was an important attribute from their pre-management work.

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An interesting idea of becoming an early professional has been explored in the context of teacher learning by McNally and Gray (2006). I suggest that this is a second phase for FLMs as they develop greater fluency in and acceptance of their role. The participants report that this occurred around 18 months into the role. It is associated with feelings of greater control over their work and having clearer separation between work and private lives as the practice of taking work home often stops about this time. The FLMs also report greater confidence to use the knowledge they have acquired and, if appropriate, to challenge the views of the Operations manager.

Amongst the cohort were FLMs considered by peers to be senior professionals – those who work with limited intervention by the Operations Manager and have developed expertise in a specific area of work. This relates to Senge's idea of personal mastery (1990), a position that needs highly developed skills in emotional intelligence, together with the ability to reflect back on earlier experiences and have a clear understanding of oneself in a context. This finds support from discourses of 'trajectories of self' (Giddens, 1991), the evolving and fluid nature of the life course.

Mastery, the final destination according to situated learning theory, in this context is limited to one participant who has all the qualities mentioned, together with the respect from all colleagues. The person also has developed the capacity to think strategically about the need to develop advisers to aspire to become future FLMs.

In conclusion, the 'unconcealing' (Heidegger, 2005) of stages in the development (becoming) of a FLM raises interesting issues for the selection and development in City Access, as well as an opportunity to discover their motivation to undertake the role (Schein, 1978).

IMPLICATIONS

City Access follows a traditional approach to recruitment and uses job descriptions and person specifications (Taylor, 2008) to select FLMs which focus on the more readily identifiable attributes of leadership. The elements of emotional intelligence, which the findings suggest are fundamental, are ignored. Whilst senior managers may have tacit knowledge of the emotional intelligence of existing advisers who apply for the FLM position, this will not have been gathered in a consistent way and there will be no knowledge about external applicants. This could lead to claims for unfair treatment notwithstanding the possibility of not selecting the most suitable candidate. Job advertisements need to articulate more clearly the personal dispositions needed to be considered for the role

FLMs are selected through an assessment centre. Whilst they consider such approaches are "felt fair" the assessment instruments should explore personal values and dispositions

through psychometric instruments to reveal applicants' self-perceptions against dimensions such as Relaxed, Worried, Tough-Minded, Emotional Control, or Optimistic (SHL on line). These could be pursued through a group exercise designed to test behaviour in situations involving tensions and conflict, and at the selection interview through behavioural event interviewing (McClelland, 1998).

For the stages in development to become a FLM, City Access should consider different development approaches. Workplace coaches allocated at induction could help to support the exploration of the "provisional self", and clarify individuals' understanding of the transition either from adviser to FLM or a manager from a different organisational context. Having a more experienced colleague to guide a FLM at the periphery helps to consolidate individual experience and encourage learning with others whilst providing support as form of safety net. Early professionals might be supported by a mentor, someone with whom the FLM does not work on a day-to-day basis but who can offer advice from a distance. As a mentor would not normally be immediately accessible, the FLM will need to take decisions on his/her own as part of developing personal confidence in the role.

Senior professionals and masters could have increasing exposure to strategic activities that will support not only their development, but help to identify those with the potential to be considered for promotion in the future as part of succession planning. In addition, senior professionals and masters could support the development of more junior colleagues, sharing tacit knowledge throughout the community.

Formal training and education interventions may also contribute to the process of becoming. City Access should explore how FLMs experiences of knowledge and skills development off-the-job can be recreated in their workplace practices. This will require an understanding of "the links between learning in two different contexts, such as college and workplace, through the perspective of the individual holistic learner" (Hodkinson, 2005, p.530).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The data are in the early stages of analysis and further explorations are needed. In particular, it will be interesting to discover if there are gender differences between the participants and the extent to which power in its different guises influences 'becoming'. As knowledge produced in the course of application (Gibbons et al., op.cit.), it is not the intention of this ethnographic project to produce generalisations for transfer and application into different organisational settings, given the debates surrounding knowledge transfer discussed earlier and issues that some writers have with case-study generalisations. What is intended is an unfolding (Hegel, op.cit.) of the experiences of an identified cohort of FLMs to understand their journeys of becoming. It is for others to consider how relevant the ideas explored here can assist with their analysis in other organisational contexts.

Further research would be interesting to discover how FLMs in other CCs 'become' or whether the findings are idiographic to this specific cohort of participants given the private / public sector ethos. For management educators I would encourage an increased use of abductive research strategies and a reflection about their contribution to manager development and becoming as part of reflexive practice.

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