

Chapter 8

Learning from Your Placement

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8.1 Introduction to learning on your placement

Continuous learning is important throughout your career. There will be few times in your career where learning will be the most important part of your daily working life, but your placement is one such time. You will be required to deliver work goals, but your placement is very much about learning too. So in this chapter we will consider how to make the most of any learning opportunities.

First, it is important to focus on the kinds of things which you will be learning, and the ways in which you will learn them, which will often be different from university learning. In Chapter 1, we saw that employers often bemoan the fact that graduates do not have the right skills and competences to be of value in the workplace. And yet, with a degree, they clearly have levels of

knowledge which at least form a platform for their working lives, and in some cases may exceed what they need in the workplace. So what is happening here?

Your ability to work at university or in the workplace depends on an appropriate balance of your knowledge, skills, and competences, but a different level of emphasis is required in the workplace, as shown in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1 Knowledge, competence, skill balance and university workplace emphasis

Area of learning	Definition	Examples	University emphasis	Workplace emphasis
Knowledge/ theory		Knowledge of technical processes, such as law, accounting standards and project management techniques, and so on	High, and critical to overall assessment	Important, especially where knowledge is central to a professional role Emphasis on knowledge/theory alone less critical than at university Degree class requirements more often a surrogate for assessing competences, determination, and ability to deliver results, rather than showing the theory/knowledge gained
Competence	The ability to apply knowledge and skills to a required level of performance		Assumed levels of competence. Knowledge and skills to write and present effectively more important	High importance
Skill		Writing Numeracy IT skills Presentation ability	Important	Important

8.2 Seeing the linkages in learning

An important area to focus on in your placement is seeing and understanding the linkages in learning. Some students fail to do this, and therefore see separate learning events as not joined up any way – for example, viewing learning SAP accounting methods for work, finance theory for university, and competence development, such as managing the customer relationship, as of little practical relevance, other than for the next job interview.

Of course, the reality is that all this learning is linked, and needs to be seen as a whole: learning SAP is important for day-to-day process work, understanding the theory of finance is important for a deeper understanding of financial management and future career development, but none of this is of value unless you can operate effectively with internal and external customers. There is a difference in emphasis between what a university regards as successful and what is required to be successful in the workplace. These differences may account for why employers talk publicly about the shortage of graduates with ‘the competences and skills needed for the workplace’ as we saw in Chapter 1. The value in your placement is that you will have the chance to develop competences and skills, as well as extend your knowledge. However, this does require a fresh look at what we learn, as well as how we learn it. Therefore, this chapter will discuss techniques to help you make the most of all your learning opportunities whilst on your placement.

At university, your competences – the range of behaviours required to get the job done, and your skills, your ability to use IT, make presentations – are important, but less important than your theoretical knowledge. In an organisational setting, your competences and skills to get the job done will often be considered to be more important than your theoretical knowledge.

It is important that you see the whole of your workplace learning as integrated: you are developing further theoretical knowledge, your workplace competences, and your workplace skills. The techniques for doing this may be different, but the outcomes in developing you as a ‘whole person’ are the same.

This difference in how you learn is one of the key reasons why you are doing a placement. The emphasis shifts from learning by reading and listening, to learning by doing. But ‘doing’ is not sufficient to learn effectively: for this to happen, we need to reflect on what we have done, and adjust our future behaviours. If this action, reflection, and adjustment do not happen, or if we skip stages in the cycle, then we are not learning, but are instead carrying on doing things the wrong way. Kolb and colleagues (1984) refer to this process of learning style as a cycle.

8.3 Learning journal

Whether or not your university requires it, and irrespective of the length of your placement, you are strongly advised to keep a Learning Journal. This is the right place to keep notes on all aspects of your placement. It

can be kept in any format which you will feel most comfortable with – paper based, or electronically.

Reflective learners (see Learning Styles, pp. 105–6) are more likely to be comfortable keeping a journal, but experience shows that all students need to be encouraged to get into the habit of writing down brief summaries of what they are learning on their placements. You should set aside time in your diary to update your journal at least once a week.

Student tips on learning journals

- I keep a journal. I write up brief notes of what happens in the day or the week – what I’ve learned, how I feel, what I still need to do. It’s surprising how you develop over time, and what you can even forget.
- I meant to keep a journal, but didn’t get round to it – I regret that now.

Your journal is there for you to keep notes on anything that is relevant to your placement – from basic facts to recording your observations, and feelings, about your placement. If you were managing the organisation, what would you do differently and why? What do you particularly like about the way the organisation works, and why? What working and management style would you personally wish to adopt? What are the advantages and disadvantages of your preferred approach and what alternatives should you consider?

Your Learning Journal will also help you to improve your understanding of how different aspects of your learning link together.

8.4 Emotional intelligence

The dynamics of the workplace, where individuals and teams strive to meet performance and stakeholder requirements, can become a cauldron of personality stressors. Towards the end of the twentieth century, research was undertaken into why US business school graduates, often with similar levels of intelligence (as measured by IQ), had very different levels of personal and business success later in life. One set of theories developed in this area suggested that intellect alone was not enough to explain these different levels of attainment. Instead, it was also necessary to consider emotional intelligence (EQ).

EQ was originally defined as:

the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions. (Salovey and Mayer, 1989)

Whilst the evidence for the importance of EQ may not yet be clear cut, the claims for its importance are less restrained. Indeed, by 1998, Daniel Goleman, who is perhaps the most eminent proponent of the value of EQ, referred to it as being even more important than IQ (1988: 5).

Goleman's work looked at EQ from two perspectives – social competence and personal competence. These may be further sub-divided as follows:

Social competence

- Empathy
- Organisational awareness
- Service orientation
- Social skills
- Developing others
- Leadership
- Communication
- Building bonds
- Teamwork collaboration.

Personal competence

- Self-aware
- Emotionally self-aware: know effects of emotions
- Accurate self-assessment
- Self-confidence
- Self-management
- Self-control
- Trustworthy
- Conscientious
- Adaptable
- Achievement orientation
- Initiative.

As you navigate your progress through your placement organisation, it is worthwhile to have these perspectives in mind as you observe the behaviours of other colleagues, especially managers, and seek to understand how positive and negative examples relate to organisation and/or work success. Try to distinguish between short-term 'wins', and longer term, sustainable, success. Keep examples of each in your learning log.

It is also worthwhile to develop a realistic view of your own social and personal competence – where you show strengths, and where you may need to develop further. Keep a note of these in your learning log as well.

8.5 Learning styles

It is helpful to have a clear view of your own learning styles. Understanding your learning styles will help you to understand how and when you are most likely to learn ... and, just as importantly, recognise other ways in which you could learn, but may be less receptive to doing so, and therefore losing a useful opportunity to extend your understanding and knowledge.

Honey and Mumford (1986, 2006) identified four main typologies of learning style: Theorist, Activist, Pragmatist and Reflector. These learning style types are summarised in Table 8.2 over the page. During your placement, it is a good idea to try out other ways of learning – perhaps experiment with learning styles and ways of doing things where you may feel less comfortable. As you do so, you will widen your learning base and may find different approaches which are equally effective as your preferred styles, as well as develop your managing styles.

8.6 Working in teams

Most organisational activity is undertaken within and between teams, so a good understanding of team working is essential when developing your personal effectiveness. In this section, we will look at:

- Your personality – how you are likely to interact with team members.
- The roles people have within teams.
- How teams interact with each other.

Your personality – how you are likely to interact with team members

What type of personality you have, and how you 'prefer to work', will clearly impact on how you get on with people with a similar outlook, a complementary outlook, or with whom you simply clash.

The roles people have within teams

Team roles does not just refer to the formal function you have within a team (for example, marketing assistant, HR assistant, etc.), but also to

Table 8.2 Learning styles

Style	People with this style tend to ...	Alternative learning approaches to consider
Theorist	Be organised, and to like clarity and structure. Analytical, methodical and uses critical thinking. Also logical problem solving.	Try to be more innovative or creative at times. Try working in situations which you may not have previously encountered or read about. Involve others in your thinking – what perspectives do they bring? Speak up more at meetings.
Activist	Prefer to learn by doing things, and settle down to work quickly and happily. Appear enthusiastic in group situations.	Likely to find it particularly hard to keep that all-important learning journal and to keep up with reading! Think and plan before you do something. What theory, process or policy should apply here? Have you thought through carefully the impact of what you are doing? (reflection) Ensure that you sustain your interest through to a successful completion.
Pragmatist	Be practical. Enjoy the real life environment. See the connections between theory and practice. Be realistic and good problem solvers.	Could develop more reflective thinking styles. May find it difficult at times to be really creative. Don't forget to maintain some reading during your placement! Another style which is likely to find keeping the learning journal a challenge!
Reflector	Think deeply about things, listen carefully to others, strong in reflection and learning. Not be comfortable starting something without having thought about it carefully first.	Actively involve others by discussing your thoughts with them. Don't always aim for perfection. Speak up more at meetings – try to make at least three significant contributions in that next meeting.

Table 8.3 Team role descriptions

Team Role	Contribution	Allowable weaknesses
Plant	Creative, imaginative, unorthodox. Solves difficult problems.	Ignores incidentals. Too pre-occupied to communicate effectively.
Resource Investigator	Extrovert, enthusiastic, communicative. Explores opportunities. Develops contacts.	Over-optimistic. Loses interest once an initial enthusiasm has passed.
Co-ordinator	Mature, confident, a good chairperson. Clarifies goals, promotes decision making, delegates well.	Can be seen as manipulative. Offloads personal work.
Shaper	Challenging, dynamic, thrives on pressure. The drive and courage to overcome obstacles.	Prone to provocation. Offends people's feelings.
Monitor Evaluator	Sober, strategic and discerning. Sees all opinions. Judges accurately.	Lacks drive and the ability to inspire others.
Teamworker	Co-operative, mild, perceptive and diplomatic. Listens, builds, avoids friction.	Indecisive in crunch situations.
Implementer	Disciplined, reliable, conservative and efficient. Turns ideas into practical actions.	Somewhat inflexible. Slow to respond to new possibilities.
Completer Finisher	Painstaking, conscientious, anxious. Searches out errors and omissions. Polishes and perfects.	Inclined to worry unduly. Reluctant to delegate.
Specialist	Single-minded, self-starting, dedicated. Provides knowledge and skills in rare supply.	Contributes on only a narrow front. Dwells on technicalities.

how you are likely to perform in a team role, irrespective of your formal organisational job title.

Belbin (1981) identified the following nine types of roles which individuals may adopt within teams.

For teams to work effectively each of these team types must be present – for example, there is little point having highly creative people, great leadership skills, etc., and then finding that work is not done at all, or not done on time. Equally, individuals will tend to have a mix of individually dominant team styles, and less dominant styles.

As you observe team meetings, consider the respective roles of team members, and how results are being achieved. As you do so, also think about your own style within a team – in which roles are you most or least comfortable, and why? To develop your effectiveness within the team, which other roles should you seek to develop? These are important areas for your Personal Development Plan, and also for reflective learning in your learning journal.

How teams interact with each other

Healthy competition between teams can be productive, and can also be fun. But too often, it can break down into inter-team competition and rivalry within the organisation, rather than team work to beat the competition. A lot of the time this can apply particularly between teams who rely on each other's interdependence to get the job done. Here are some illustrations of what previous placement students experienced.

I worked in the HR shared services area. Line and even HR managers never seemed to understand the time it took to ensure that references and background security checks were completed before someone could start work.

In change projects, we had some really good people, but our work was hampered because the people in procurement were so slow in supporting us. So we never really talked to them.

The trouble is, the people in planet x [head office] just don't seem to understand what it's like here in the branch, working with customers.

There may well be issues and problems which need to be addressed in each of these illustrations, but it is highly unlikely that the full blame rests in each case with 'the other department'. So it is worth understanding how this can happen, and what organisations may be able to do to manage it.

However, each of these quotes above are examples of 'group think' – this concept has been widely researched in organisations and has been defined as:

The term given to the pressure that highly cohesive groups exert on their members for uniform and acceptable decisions that actually reduces their capacity to make effective decisions. (Janis, 1972)

We can see examples of group think in our everyday lives. Sports teams, ever optimistic about their capability over rivals, and yet they still lose; excessive

commitment to the strength of 'my organisation or brand', without seeing the value in competitors or niche players; my university is better than your's, because ...

Working well and effectively within a cohesive and high performing team is important to individual, team, and organisational success. But the big risks of over-reliance on group think include a failure:

- To think through and analyse problems sufficiently clearly.
- To check all information sources objectively – for example, with an external benchmark or the use of external advisers; even a failure to trust internal advisers who are not part of the group.
- To have a second look at options which may have been rejected previously, but now, for different reasons, may be viable.
- To consider facts objectively, rejecting external information as flawed or invalid when it conflicts with the group think.
- To assess risk sufficiently.

So strong team cohesion is important, but also has its downsides. Team leaders can redress some of the negative effects of group think by using various techniques, such as:

- Asking some team members to adopt a 'devil's advocate' stance when discussing plans.
- Encouraging each person in the group to think 'outside the box' and to not just accept ideas without thinking about them critically.
- Using 360 degree feedback and customer survey techniques to see how others see us, and the service we provide.
- Including 'mystery shop' competitors and feedback to the team as to what others may do better than us.

On your placement, remember that it is not your role to change the world where this is not asked of you. Your role is to fit in within the team and be a valued team player. However, do observe and understand what may be happening with group think and behaviours within and between departments and with competitor organisations. And if this was your own business, what would you do to resolve it?? You can record some of this material in your learning journal, and within your personal development plan.

Getting the most from your placement: university views

Take reflective self-improvement seriously.

Use a learning journal to record your learning as your placement progresses.

Make sure you are properly organised: know when and where you need to be (diary); know what you need to do (clear work objectives).

8.7 Personal development planning

Why it is important

Good personal development planning is essential to make the most of your placement. But there are many reasons why you may give it second place, against more immediate pressures such as learning your day-to-day role, not knowing what to include with your personal development plan, being too busy, being too tired, or simply finding it an irksome chore. However, the breadth of experience and opportunity you have in your placement will only be maximised if you approach this methodically.

You may be given a format for your personal development plan by your host organisation, or your university. If this is not possible, a wide range of professional bodies has formats for their members, so go to the Continuing Professional Development site of the professional body you hope to join on graduation, and use a plan format from that organisation.

And if all this fails, then put together your own plan format! The key steps are to plan your development, to undertake your development, and then review what you have done and re-plan for the future. SMART objectives are required in your planning – not vague and unrealistic promises to yourself, which will disappear as quickly as last year's New Year resolutions.

Tips for managing your personal development

It is easy to overlook the active management of your personal development – some people expect learning to 'come naturally'. For others it may be a chore, or can appear to be irrelevant. This is more likely to be because of your personal learning style, rather than the discipline you are studying at university, or the environment in which you are working. Tips for how to manage your personal development more effectively are:

- Regularly review what you are doing, the things you have encountered, and the things which you recognise you still need to learn. Spend half an hour a week on this activity, and diarise when and where you will do it.
- Write down what you have learned and still need to learn – facts, views, when you have succeeded, and how that was achieved.
- Do an honest self-reflection when an assignment has been difficult – how and why did this happen? How could you have handled stakeholders differently? Were you adequately prepared yourself? Did you have the necessary skills, and resources to do the work? Were the requirements sufficiently clear?

What to include in your personal development plan

Remember that you are developing three types of learning in your placement:

- Your theoretical, professional and academic knowledge – the things which will be of greatest value to you for university and professional development reasons.
- Your competences – the behaviours which an organisation looks at to assess your capability to achieve the required results in the organisation.
- Your skills – such as IT, project management techniques, presentation to large groups, etc.

It is important that you see these as part of an overall learning plan. They are not individual elements for different audiences. They are an integrated part of you developing your CV, employability, and potential – your personal employment brand. Remember also that your personal development plan needs to achieve two key aims: to ensure your effectiveness in your current role; and to provide a springboard for your future career. The box format of Personal Development Formats may not be the best place to start here, so we suggest an alternative approach, the Holistic Personal Development Plan to consider where you are in your role now, and what your key strengths are, your development areas in technical/professional/academic knowledge; what you would really like to do in three to five years' time, and what your personal/family and friends' priorities are. These can be mapped together as shown in Figure 8.2 over the page.

Your university or organisation may be able to give you guidance or instructions about what it requires you to have in your personal development plan. Obviously, you need to follow this, but also think about the wider issues in your personal development which we discussed in Chapters 6–8. Organisations may also focus more on the learning they think you need to achieve during the next 12 months, or for the period of your placement. But you need a wider horizon too – what kind of things do you want to be doing in the next three to five years? What do you need to do now in order to prepare for them?

Think also about *how* your placement organisation works. Read the sections in this book about leadership and management: how do you see these standards being applied? Read up about group working: again, how is this applied in practical situations, what are the consequences, and how might things be done differently? And think about yourself as an individual as well: not simply about your evolving academic and professional knowledge, but also about how your style interacts with other colleagues: what works well, what not so well, and what you can do personally to build on your strengths and address some of your development areas.

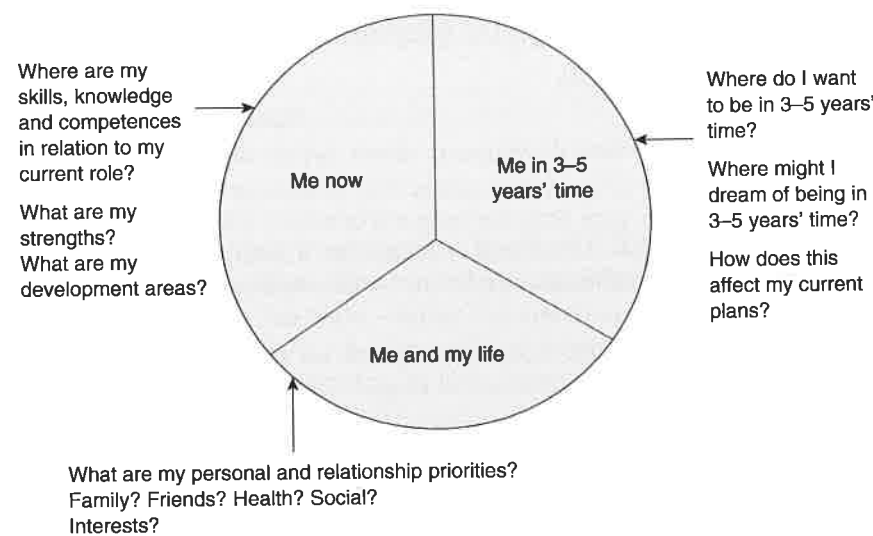


Figure 8.2 Personal development learning format (Holistic Personal Development Plans © 2008 Peoplevalued Partnership Ltd)

Personal development plan formats

Check first whether your university, professional body, or organisation has a personal development format which you are required to use. If they do not, a simple format to use is illustrated in Table 8.4. But what is more important than the format which you use, is to make sure that your personal development gets a regular and systematic review. On your placement, you should update this at least every four weeks.

8.8 Using in-house learning resources

On the job training

Your placement will almost certainly be packed with learning opportunities – both from your placement organisation, as well as from requirements from your university. But much of the training will also be undertaken at your place of work, and as part of your day-to-day activity. Research (CIPD, 2008) has shown that this ‘on the job training’ is both the most popular training, and the most useful. You will make greatest use of this training if you also combine it with the reflective learning approach discussed in this chapter, and keep track of what you are learning, and your response to it, within your learning journal.

In-house courses

Once you are in your placement organisation, you will have a great chance to use in-house learning facilities to develop your usefulness to

Table 8.3 Sample personal development format

Name	Plan for period	
	October–January	October–January
What do I want to learn? (Don't forget, this needs to cover academic/professional skills; your competence development; and your skills development)	How could I do this? (What learning options do you have? Reading? Coaching? e-learning? Course? Job shadow? On the job training? Face to face training?)	What will I do? (Ensure that you write this in SMART terms – Specific action; Measurable, Agreed (does your manager need to sign off?); Realistic; and Timed)
Review my learning styles	Complete learning styles questionnaire; discuss with mentor	Research learning styles in October
Be more confident in group presentations	Ask for feedback from manager	Do e-learning presentation skills course on 15 November
Prepare for placement tutor meetings	Diarise meetings now (or e-mail tutor to see when dates planned)	Offer to present customer review figures to next meeting in December
		Arrange sessions for November and February; Diarise two weeks beforehand to prepare reports, etc., for meeting
		Strong on theory and activist; weak reflection score
		Consider ways to increase reflection; make sure 30 minutes a week set aside to update learning journal
		Find other ways to get more learning
		Time management and readiness for tutor

(Cont'd)

Table 8.3

Plan for period			
October-January			
Name			
Progress dissertation meetings	Estimate timetable and write to tutor to suggest meeting times	Request meetings for November, February, and April	Make sure my dissertation is written and submitted on time
		Expect to do most in-company research in Feb and March, so speak to manager to arrange	Improve overall academic performance and chance of success
Find two mentors in the organisation to help me	Not sure; speak to manager at next 1:1 at end of October	Make sure I have mentorship arranged by mid November, and have met them by end of November	Meet about every five weeks, or as required, to understand progress and put learning into context
Learn Dreamweaver software	Spend time with designer to watch and do some tasks Request to attend in-company training	Try to complete before year end	For future use; offer to cover during holidays or staff absences

your placement organisation, and in doing so, you can enhance your CV and future employability.

Good examples of the types of learning you might expect are:

- Accounting systems.
- Practical customer/client services skills.
- Project management skills.
- HR software packages.
- Selling skills.
- Career development skills.
- Software training, to enhance skills which you may already have, or may develop further, such as project management, Dreamweaver, database management, etc.

Many organisations, especially the larger ones, are increasingly using e-learning (computer or web-based learning), or blended solutions, with a combination of e-learning and more conventional learning, such as face to face training. Once you have settled into the workplace, become familiar with the learning facilities available and spot courses which you might like to access later, and discuss with your manager when/how it may be appropriate to access this training.

Professional and business journals

Many organisations take out regular subscriptions to professional and business journals. It is a good idea to see what is available, and to get yourself on the circulation if possible. If you do not already do so, get a quality newspaper once or twice a week, and take some time to read the business sections.

Get a feel for what is happening in the wider business world in your area. What impact does it have ... or not have ... on your organisation? why? How is your organisation responding?

Planning your training

Good training experiences should be planned, and should fit in with future work requirements. But it is not uncommon for placement students to have quieter periods – at these times, both you and your manager will find access to previously identified and prioritised learning as a very effective alternative use of your time.

8.9 Reflective learning

There is no fixed format for reflective learning – what is more important is that you step back critically and review how you have performed a

piece of work, and that you then understand what you could do differently next time. Some students (and managers) do not find this straightforward, so this short example below shows the type of reflection you might include in your learning journal. Note that it:

- Is relatively short.
- *Reviews* what went well, and not so well.
- *Plans* what you would do next time.
- Plans further learning.
- Includes how you felt at the time.

Example of reflective learning for Learning Journal

Introduction

- I was asked to prepare the monthly sales figures for the region, and present them to the next team meeting, with recommendations about what we need to do in the next quarter.
- This was a rush job, since the usual sales co-ordinator had been on a course, then went on holiday, so I only had four days to discuss what was usually done.

What went well

- The presentation on the day went well, and my manager thanked me for filling in at short notice.
- Most of the figures were ready on time.
- I was able to show the figures graphically, which doesn't seem to have been done before, which seems strange.

What didn't go so well

- One of the sellers said that the figures didn't look right, and that a big sales order completed half a day before the cut off hadn't appeared in the figures.
- I didn't understand two sets of abbreviations, which was a bit embarrassing when I was asked what they meant.

How I would do things differently next time

- The sales administration office didn't have the figures ready on the day they were supposed to, so I had to work at home to get these ready – somebody then said this always happens. So next time I

will tell them clearly when I need the figures, and check with the supervisor a couple of days earlier if they are likely to be late.

- I will learn the abbreviations in advance!
- I didn't understand the point about late figures, so I will double check with the sales supervisor if all work has been processed, and show on the graph the actual cut-off time.

Further Learning?

- I know I sounded nervous when I presented the figures, but I used the presentation techniques we had been taught, and at least they followed what I was saying. Next time, I know that I can be more confident – I did OK this time, and know now how to get the figures right in advance – I feel good about this.

8.10 Mentors

Finding a mentor

When you start in your host organisation, you may be offered a mentor. The role of the mentor is to provide a more independent third party, who can advise you, discuss your progress, and take a wider view than may be possible with your line manager, or a learning and development adviser within the HR department. They can then help you to set up your own action plan, having been able to discuss the issues with an 'independent' adviser.

If you are offered a mentor, the ways of working together will normally be explained to you. Mentors may be trained in their role (for example, at BP), or at least have formal guidance about their role. Your mentor may suggest a formal meeting schedule (for example, meeting once a month), or may simply offer to be there when needed.

Mentors do this work in addition to their normal work roles, and you will get as much from the mentoring relationship as you put into it. For example, when you have a meeting booked with your mentor, think about what you want to get from the meeting in advance. Good practice is to do a short note (maximum one page) on what you have been doing, and what you want to get from the meeting: send this to your mentor about four to five working days ahead of your scheduled meeting date.

If your host organisation does not even have an informal mentor scheme, still consider having a mentor to help you navigate your way through your placement (and, as you will find, your later career too). Discuss this with your manager or any placement student who has recently worked in the organisation. Your mentor may be outside your host organisation – the important thing is that you can get on with each other, respect each other's views, even if these may be different, and have the willingness to make the mentoring relationship successful.

If you have a mentor, you are likely to develop broader perspectives than if you only rely on the direction and support of your line manager, valuable as this may be. Should you find yourself with difficult decisions or situations, your mentor's greater experience may help you to navigate your way through. And just sometimes, mentors' broader perspectives can help you to develop your network of contacts and possible longer term job opportunities.

To find a mentor, ask your manager for a recommendation, and approach that person to see if he/she would be willing to work with you on this basis. Some organisations may already have a list of people who have offered to be mentors, thus making your initial approach that much easier. Explain what you hope to get from the mentoring relationship, and how often you would like to meet. Agree with your mentor a meeting schedule, and check two to three days in advance that it is still convenient for your mentor that you should meet. When you see your mentor, it is possible that they will appear to take the lead by asking you how things are progressing.

Use your time with your mentor effectively. Prepare for the meeting in advance by having a short agenda, and notes relevant to the meeting. You should be able to discuss anything with your mentor, in confidence. However, topics which you may find it helpful to discuss with your mentor to establish a business-like relationship could include:

- Preparation and progress for work, a presentation, or a project with which you are involved.
- Review/reflection on how a work assignment or project has gone.
- Where you may have difficulty navigating your way through organisational structures, or politics.
- Advice on the type of future assignment or learning which would be beneficial in extending your learning.

Why placement students need mentors
(In conversation with Professor David Clutterbuck,
author of *Everyone Needs a Mentor*, 2004)

The value of placement students having a mentor

Having a mentor provides people arriving in a new environment with a powerful resource for understanding the culture they have entered. It gives them an empathetic colleague, to whom they can turn when they feel uncertain or unvalued (particularly common when the placement organisation hasn't really prepared for receiving them). Self-esteem tends to be higher amongst placement students, who have an effective mentor.

The value of managers having students as mentees

All teams gravitate towards groupthink as the members become familiar with each other's ways of thinking. The placement mentee, properly used, can provide a level of naïve challenge to what the team does and how it does it.

The most common benefit expressed by effective mentors is the challenge they receive from their discussions with their mentee. Where there is a generation gap, the value of this challenge is greatly increased.

As a student, the particular things you need to develop in mentoring relationships are:

- Make clear your own learning needs.
- Ask the mentor about the learning they would like to gain from the relationship.
- Balance listening, questioning and challenging what you see and hear.
- Show that you value the attention you receive from them.
- Always prepare for mentoring sessions (What do I want to discuss? What examples can I use? etc.).
- Always spend time afterwards reflecting on what you have learned from the mentoring conversation and how you can apply this learning.
- Have in mind the potential for you to become a mentor in due course: what can you observe from this mentoring relationship that will build on your own mentoring skills?

8.11 Networking

Why network

It's true! Effective networking really can open up new opportunities for you. Some of the advantages of effective networking are:

- Organisation awareness: a better understanding of the structure and functions of the organisation, who does what and where, and organisational politics.
- Movement of people: as you broaden your networks, you will gain a better understanding of how and where job opportunities are created. Understand how people from one area are considered for work in other areas, or, alternatively, if there are job moves which do not seem to happen – why not?
- Job or training opportunities inside or outside the organisation.
- You never know what may turn up!

How to network

Networking is widely accepted in organisations. But being obvious about it is regarded as being over-instrumental, and is usually a major turn-off for most people. So it is important to make and take good opportunities to network in an acceptable way.

You can network at formal events, such as courses and team briefings, as well as less formal events – perhaps leaving drinks for a colleague – and even less formal occasions, such as waiting for lunch, at the coffee machine, etc.

The important thing is how you network. And key to this is showing interest in the other person, rather than seeking to impress the other person. Here are some ideas for good networking:

- As a general rule, quality of network contacts is far more important than how many people you try to network with.
- Be aware that networking can happen at any time. Be ready for it.
- Show an interest in the other person, by asking questions: Where do you work? What do you do? Quickly move beyond questions which have yes/no, or single word answers – they are unlikely to engage a conversation, and, at worst, can sound as though you are putting the other person through the third degree. So more open questions (such as 'What do you think of...?', or 'How do you find...?') are much more likely to nurture a networked relationship.
- Offer help or information as easily as you may seek it, since this is far more likely to establish trust in a relationship.
- When you are talking to one person, maintain interest and eye contact. There is little worse than a forced conversation with one or both of you scanning the room for somebody more interesting to speak to.
- Follow up afterwards, if appropriate. If you have said that you would send an article or some information, make sure that you do so promptly.
- Finally, networking is about making sense of random connections. The person who is not obviously a useful network connection may be one step away from a contact that will be. So this is also a reminder: networking is of value, but only really works when we treat people as though they are also valued, and are not just a means to an end.

8.12 Leadership and management

If you plan to be a manager yourself during your career, your placement will be a good opportunity to:

- See and experience at first hand the differences and similarities between good leadership, and good management.
- Develop a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences between leadership and management.

- Work out your preferred style, and how you will become effective in these critical roles.

So far, we have considered how to be effective in an organisation by looking at the competences and behaviours which are most likely to make you effective (so, delivering results, team working, and so on). As we discuss leadership and management, we will look at what leaders and managers actually do.

Social scientists have found it difficult to say what the elements of good leadership are. If you think about leadership across history, that difficulty becomes apparent, especially as characteristics of good leadership in one situation (for example, war) may be quite different from those required at key times of social or national change. So, whatever you may think about the values of leaders such as Napoleon, Churchill, Geldof, or Mandela, all had different things to achieve in the leadership they gave to people at a particular time, and in their styles of achieving this. But the one thing that we can say about these and other leaders is that they had a clear sense of focus – of what needed to be done – and how they wanted to do it. As with other leaders, they had a firm view of what they wanted to do, the process they would adopt to do this, and that this was the right action at the time to enable large numbers of people to share a new vision, and engage and work to a new direction, by feeling inspired and motivated by that leader to do so.

Good management is different from good leadership, but there are overlapping elements in both activities. Managers are more likely to be involved in the technicalities of the job to be done (such as planning and resource allocation), but will also have wider roles akin to leadership, such as acting as a figurehead to the team, and communicating with the team and others.

One of the classic views of the role of the manager is presented by Mintzberg (1975), who suggested that managers have some or all of the following roles:

- 1 *Figurehead*: as a representative of the organisation.
- 2 *Leader*: interacts, motivates, develops team members.
- 3 *Liaison*: networks with contacts inside the organisation, and through professional bodies.
- 4 *Monitor*: gathers information from within and outside the organisation.
- 5 *Disseminator*: communicates information to the team on a group or one to one basis.
- 6 *Spokesperson*: provides information to people outside the organisation.
- 7 *Entrepreneur*: designs and initiates change in the organisation, which may include working hours, new ways of working with processes, products, or technology.
- 8 *Disturbance handler*: deals with problems as they arise.
- 9 *Resource allocator*: controls people, budgets, resources, allocation of time, etc.
- 10 *Negotiator*.

Mintzberg's role of the manager is written in terms which may be different from today's competence language, and some of the roles indicative of a manager may also be performed by employees who are not managers themselves. Nevertheless, Mintzberg's list gives you a useful benchmark to consider those activities you may expect to see in managers, and how these are being performed.

So back in your placement, which styles work well in the way supervisors and managers work with people, and which do not work well, and why? Are there differences between short-term and long-term styles? What works, and what leaves you and your colleagues motivated, keen to learn, and productive and effective? What doesn't work and leaves you ineffective, exasperated, and stressed? Why do these things happen in these ways, and are there alternative approaches which could be used? What additional factors would you add to Mintzberg's list? For example, how important is the technical capability to perform the role? Is Mintzberg's list too passive for the twenty-first century – for example, should 'delivering results' be part of a manager's role? Are some aspects of a manager's role so fundamentally important that they should be mentioned as an additional role, such as developing a diverse and balanced team, without a bias according to gender, ethnicity, disability, age, or orientation and beliefs?

If you are aspiring to be a future manager this is also a good time to think about your own personal styles, why you would choose those approaches, and what strengths and development areas you have; you should note these in your personal development plan.

8.13 Continued Professional Development (CPD)

If, after your degree result and graduation, you plan to join a professional body, you may be able to have part of your work placement count towards your CPD for membership. Check on the membership site to see what your professional requirements are, whether pre-registration is required, and what format is necessary for any record keeping and learning logs.

8.14 Summary

What distinguishes your learning in an organisation from your university learning is the much greater emphasis which organisational learning places on learning by doing. But just doing is not sufficient for you to learn – it must be linked to a methodical approach, clear personal objectives, and an understanding of what you personally find most – and least – comfortable in your personal learning styles.

8.15 Further information

Further reading

Clutterbuck, D. (2004) *Everyone Needs a Mentor*. London: CIPD. The leading book for mentors and those seeking a mentor – how to get one, and how to manage the relationship effectively.

Furnham, A. (2005) *The Psychology of Behaviour at Work*. Hove and New York: Psychology Press.

For an excellent discussion about characteristics, roles, and styles of leadership and management, and a consideration of a wide and interesting account of peoples' behaviour in the workplace.

Green, F. (2006) *Demanding Work*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Written by an economist, this takes a tough look at how and whether factors such as the growing affluence and the knowledge economy really make a difference to our quality of working life.

Honey, P. and Mumford, A. (2006) *The Learning Styles Questionnaire, 80 Item Version*. Hastings: Peter Honey. Questionnaire to find out what your preferred learning styles are likely to be.

Professional bodies

If you are preparing your career for a particular profession, check their websites for up to date information on the following.

What issues/topics are currently important? Include them on your learning objectives. CPD requirements: What are they? Can you register now? Will your placement count towards CPD?

Having followed up on your CPD, make sure you do CPD as you go along – don't leave it to the end of your placement.

Checklist

- 1 Check your learning style, and understand the strengths you may achieve and the development opportunities which you may miss with this style.
- 2 Get yourself a learning journal; if you cannot trust yourself to update this as events happen, diarise to update your journal at a given time, for about 30 minutes, every week.

(Cont'd)

- 3 Find one or two mentors – work out when and how often it is most productive to meet; make sure you are properly prepared before you go to see your mentor.
- 4 Look widely to develop your learning – what people do in their work is important, and you need to understand and perform well in what you do and how you do it. But look more broadly than this – how and why do they work in this way? How might it be done differently (and why isn't it done differently)? What influences do individual and team behaviours have on the way work is done? How are people managed within the organisation? How do you prefer to be managed? What will be your preferred management style(s) and why?
- 5 Always scan the organisation for new learning opportunities during your placement – on the job training, volunteering for assignments, etc.
- 6 By the end of your placement, if you have managed your learning well, you will be able to explain it clearly because it is in your Personal Development Plan or your Learning Journal, and you will have kept these up to date as your placement progresses. If you leave this to the end of your placement, whether for university or professional CPD purposes, you will be tearing your hair out ... and you will have missed valuable learning in the process of your placement.