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Feeling Our Way: An ethnographic exploration of university staff experiences of ‘soft skills’ learning and development programmes

Alison Marie Fixsen

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Westminster for the degree of Doctor of Professional Studies (Personal and Professional Development in Education)

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Abstract

Despite their ubiquitous presence in higher education (HE), staff learning and development programmes (LDPs) featuring soft skills remain a largely uncharted dimension of global university culture. Few studies have explored their meaning for participants or the relationship between LDPs, self-care and managerial practices.

This study used autoethnography to explore staff experiences of learning and development programmes (LDPs) within one HE setting. Fieldwork included personal participation in a variety of LDPs and 25 semi-structured interviews with participants from a cross section of programmes and work sectors. Symbolic ritual and ritual interaction theory were used to interpret study data. Findings suggest that, as social worlds, LDPs featuring soft skills offer and fulfill practical and affective functions. From a social interaction perspective they emerged as an embodied, enjoyable and communal component of staff training and development, providing actors with a space, in which they can temporarily redefine themselves vis-à-vis the group and the wider social world. The ritual aspects of the LDP social world helped to create for participants a sense of passage with a beginning, middle and completion phase, which in contrast to the unending state of liminality associated with modern life, may help explain their appeal to temporary and part time staff, myself included. On some programmes the focus was on performance management (e.g. leadership skills), on others self-care (e.g. meditation, resilience), however most included both. Theatrical and dramatic devices were frequently used as motivational tools, encouraging academic staff in particular to emotionally invest in an increasingly mandatory entrepreneurial culture, with which they might otherwise be reluctant to engage.

As ‘social worlds’ with neoliberal directives, LDPs promote various self-governance activities in the form of self-entrepreneurism and novel, corporate versions of self-care. I propose three major subdivisions; self-entrepreneurial activities, self-care, and self-examination, which together constitute a hybrid form of self-governance. By emphasising self-responsibility they avert wider discussions concerning participation,

power and inequalities in HE. The categories of ‘career nomad,’ ‘reluctant entrepreneur’ and ‘course hopper,’ that participants were seen to embody in this study, may prove useful for further research into modern workplace identities, while my observations concerning liminality in the modern workplace has implications for the future direction of staff learning and development. Study outputs focused on sharing results with senior stakeholders involved in strategic planning of future LDPs, and considering more collaborative and holistic ways to promote staff wellbeing within the organisation.

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Author’s Declaration

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work, and that except where specific reference is made to the work of others, the contents of this dissertation are original and have not been submitted in whole or in part for consideration for any other degree or qualification in this, or any other University.

Glossary of Terms

Activities of the self

Nomenclature used in this study to describe a category of self-oriented interventions with a shared emphasis on self-governance.

Career hybrids

Term borrowed from Garoupa and Ginsburg (2011) to describe staff who combine different career roles, e.g. lecturing and external consultancy work.

Career nomads

Nomenclature used in this study to describe staff members on time-limited contracts, who accept mobility as part of their job.

Communitas

The term given to a social communion, in which individuals submit together, under the general authority of the elders, managers, organisers (Turner, 1969). The group's pleasure in sharing common experience (Turner, 2012).

Corporate Services (CS)

Broadly defined as organisation-wide functions that deliver business support services to serve internal customers in the delivery of departmental objectives in the best means possible. In the context of this project CS is used for all internal corporate service and administrative sections at University.

Course hoppers

Nomenclature used in this study to describe staff members who have taken part in a range of LDPs of the self-care variety (i.e. they go from programme to programme).

Emotional capital

A set of personal and social emotional competencies which constitute a resource inherent to the person, and which is useful for the personal, professional and organisational development and associated with personal, social and economic success (Gendron, 2005).

Emotional competences

The functional capacity wherein a human can reach their goals after an emotion-eliciting encounter (Saarni, 2000); a set of generic competences closely related to emotional intelligence and linked to work performance (Goleman *et al.*, 2000)

Emotional energy (EE)

Long-lasting emotion, resulting from a successful interaction ritual. A feeling of confidence, elation, strength, enthusiasm, and initiative that comes from taking action (Collins 2004).

Embodied engagement

Participation of the entire self in an activity, including in understanding and meaning making (Ray, 2006; Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

Emotional entrainment

The feeling of affective attunement with others experienced during rituals (Collins, 2004).

Emotional Intelligence (EI)

A set of social and emotional skills associated with the accurate appraisal and expression of emotion in self and others, effective regulation of emotion self and others, and use of emotion or feelings to motivate plan and achieve in one's life (Salovey and Mayer, 1989)

Human Resource Management (HRM)

Human resource management (HRM) can be defined as a strategic and coherent approach to the management of the people within the organisation, and individual and collective contribution to the achievement of organisational objectives (Armstrong, 2006, p3). However it is generally used in this study to refer to an HR division within the University of Westminster.

Liminal

A threshold state, in between, transitional. Liminal entities are neither here nor there, they are 'betwixt and between' the positions assigned to law, custom convention and ceremony (Turner, 1969).

Neoliberalism

A term used to describe an economic philosophy that emerged among European liberal scholars in the 1930s. It later became associated with the free-market and privatisation policies espoused by Thatcher and Reagan in the late 1970's and 80's (Hall, 2007; Peters, 2012).

Organisational Development and Wellbeing (OD&W)

Generally used in this study to refer to an HR division within the University of Westminster.

PPDR process

An annual professional, performance and development review process with which all employees within the University of Westminster are expected to engage, whereby key performance objectives and competences are recorded and reviewed.

Reluctant entrepreneurs

Nomenclature used in this study to describe staff (often academics) who express ambiguous feelings concerning entrepreneurialism in HE.

Research Excellence Framework (REF)

A method of assessing the research of UK higher education institutions, which replaced the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE).

Soft skills

Personal and professional attributes which complement discipline specific skills and help individuals to successfully navigate the requirements, challenges and opportunities of their job role in pursuit of personal, team or organisational goals (Heckman and Kautz, 2012).

Technologies of self

Techniques that human beings use to understand themselves, and which ‘permit individuals to effect by their own means or, with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves.’

Chapter 1: Introduction

Author's ethnographic notes extract (September 2014)

What am I doing here? I'm feeling my way through this. I am not quite sure what brought me to this point. But I will approach this heuristically, allowing myself freedom to immerse in myself in the subject matter, the experience and the moment. I start with the premise that experiences within group learning contexts have the potential to change us. In our efforts to acquire new skills and competences, must we leave aside other traits, for instance certain habits, views or behaviours? Skills are behavioural attributes; so how much do they represent our identity? If we work at developing new skills do they simply bring about a temporary shift, overlying more deeply ingrained behaviour/thinking patterns? For example, I would like to be more organised. I would like to be a more focused listener. If I take a course to improve my organisational skills, how deeply will this change my patterns of thinking and behaviour? And to what extent is this influenced by my experience on the day? We learn skills as we perform them, but how does this affect our sense of identity? Does developing 'soft skills' such as self-awareness, interpersonal communication skills, make for a more or less authentic sense of identity? And how does this affect our relationships with our co-performers? Adopting the performance metaphor I will move the spotlight around from myself as actor to myself as interacting with my co performers, including my fellow participants on programmes. I will focus on the embodied experience, noting how my feelings affect my actions, and my actions make me feel.

1.1 Area of investigation

Despite their ubiquitous presence in higher education, staff learning and development programmes (LDPs) featuring the types of personal and interpersonal competences commonly referred to as soft skills, remain a largely uncharted dimension of global university culture. In this thesis, by means of autoethnography, I explore staff learning

and development programmes (LDPs) which feature the types of personal and interpersonal competences commonly referred to as soft skills. This was largely achieved through conducting extensive fieldwork within the higher education institution in which I work. My explorations included personally participating in a range of LDPs, interviewing 25 members of staff, and examining various documents and artifacts concerned with staff learning, development and competences.

I have divided the thesis into 7 chapters: introduction, literature review, methodology, data collection, findings, discussion and conclusions. Each chapter is further divided into headings and subheadings. In section one of this chapter I explain my rationale for this work, including the initial questions, which led me to this area of study and the context of this work. In section 1.2, I explain how my interests, agency and epistemological view influenced my choice of study. In section 1.3, I set out the context of this study, and the place of personal and interpersonal competences within University culture. In section 1.4, I turn to the socio-political context of learning and development programmes to emphasise the changing culture within higher education (HE). In section 1.5, the subject of soft skills, and the functions and implications of LDPs are covered. In section 1.6, I set out my study aims, my research questions and my study objectives. In section 1.7, I consider the significance of the study including what I consider to be its unique contribution to knowledge. I end this chapter with a summary in section 1.8.

1.1.1 Study rationale

Self-improvement practices, often in the form of soft skills programmes, are now an accepted part of the range of development schemes for university staff across different continents (Abdul Wahat et al., 2013; Junrat et al., 2014; Kamin, 2013; Schulz, 2008). The claim is that such learning and development programmes (LDPs) change attitudes and behaviours (Laker and Powell, 2011; Schulz, 2008), increase staff productivity and well-being (Kamin, 2013; Schulz, 2008), and offer solutions to the stresses of the modern day workplace, including those associated with new managerial agendas. As a

consequence, staff learning and development programmes (LDPs) featuring ‘soft skills,’ now represent a substantial part of organisational strategy towards improving staff productivity, engagement and wellbeing. To date however, few studies have qualitatively examined the experiences of staff who attend these courses, their rationale for participating in them (Junrat *et al.*, 2014; Ngang *et al.*, 2013; Lomas *et al.*, 2016), the relationship between LDPs, self-care and performance management, and the potential paradoxes inherent in them.

While LDPs appear to be an appropriate means of developing soft skills, and thus a more emotionally competent body of staff, there are fundamental questions to be asked concerning the nature and purpose of these programmes. First, to what extent do these programmes assist staff in their physical and emotional navigation through an increasingly entrepreneurial HE environment? Second, does their emphasis on self-governance create a tension between corporate and personal goals and values? By ‘diving deep’ into the cultural and emotional centre of staff learning and development within my own university, and acknowledging myself as part of the process and the story I am relating (Anderson, 2006), I aim to offer insights and identify potential areas of conflict, improve my own professional practice as a lecturer and researcher, and work with others to innovate and take forward sound, workable practices within and beyond my own institution.

1.1.2 Context and terminology

My operational context for this study is the University of Westminster, henceforth referred to as the University. I have located this study within my own institution for reasons of interest and convenience, but also to provide outputs of direct relevance and use to my own place of work. I use the term LDPs to cover the experiential face-to-face learning and development programmes I observed and attended, which were largely voluntary and included a range of personal and interpersonal soft skills activities. This is to distinguish them from other types of adult learning and continuing professional development (CPD) programmes, including those that lead to

higher professional qualifications and online or blended learning courses. I have chosen to examine face-to-face activities, rather than online or blended courses, in order to understand the unique experiences of direct interpersonal learning. In the following section, I consider my current role (including in relation to knowing, becoming, and professional identity) and the context for this Doctorate in Professional Studies research project. I then examine LDPs within HE and consider how this subject area relates to my previous and present work as a senior lecturer within the Department of Life Sciences at the University.

1.2 Personal agency, motivations and experience

Why do we choose to follow a particular path or direction? As I explained in my prologue and introduction, I began this study with an open frame of mind, but also with my own frame of reference, including background, knowledge and experience of those human transformation processes that fall under the category of ‘soft skills’ learning and development. In this section, I examine my personal agency, including my role within the University of Westminster, my educational background and epistemological world-view, and explain how they influenced my choice of methodological approach for this study.

I have worked as a part-time senior lecturer and researcher in the Faculty of Science and Technology at the University for thirteen years, where I have been involved in the development of a wide number of personal and professional development initiatives for both students and staff. My interest and close involvement in different aspects and avenues of personal and interpersonal skills goes back much further however, as I have been practising and teaching various forms of self-care (yoga, meditation, healthy eating etc.) since the 1970’s. Outside the University, I have practised as a professional homeopath and complementary therapist for two decades, have taught and lectured nationally and internationally, and have published many articles on health and wellbeing. Within the therapeutic culture, emotional experiences are ‘honoured’ (Meyerson, 1996, p168) and the capacity to reflect on one’s own and

others feelings is seen as a precondition for both personal growth and professional success. I consider that both my own person-centred skills, and my professional work in this area leave me in a strong position to investigate the experiential side of LDPs.

In my roles within the University and beyond, I have designed, led and taught on courses and modules on healthcare, interpersonal communication, self-development and practitioner ethics and competences, including incorporating effective soft skills activities into undergraduate modules and staff development workshops. Context awareness and adaptivity (Syvanen *et al.*, 2005) is especially important in the modern HE context, where learners come from diverse backgrounds, with varying expectations and goals (Turner, 2013). Having worked with adult learners since the 1980's at different levels and contexts, I am cognisant of the importance of catering for a variety of learning styles and needs, while maintaining a strong awareness of my own frame of reference (Lievens *et al.*, 2008) and my limited capacity to appreciate all human perspectives. The ethos behind my teaching has always been to promote deeper levels of self-awareness and learning. Toward this aim I have developed many experiential and reflective learning activities involving group work, role-play, music, movement and multimedia, creative thinking exercises and so on. My goal, as educator within different institutional contexts, has been to contribute to the creation of a more holistic, learner centred environment through which both staff and students can flourish, support and learn from one another. As a fairly long serving staff member within the University, I have witnessed and been part of radical changes in structure and culture within my own and other HEIs and the increasing emphasis on self-governance practices and soft skills development in staff and students. I begin with some concerns about the future direction of university governance, and its effects on staff wellbeing, morale and work practices, however I am aware that this reflects my personal interests and position (including as a female, part-time academic). In addition to broadening and deepening my own perspective, the knowledge and experience I gain from this doctorate, can, I believe, positively contribute to the discussions around future staff development and wellbeing initiatives within and

outside organisation.

My previous higher education studies were in the fields of social studies and comparative religion, and the ethos I gained from these disciplines lies at the heart of my present work. As an undergraduate student studying social anthropology, I became fascinated by what we can learn about society through bringing alive the experiences of others in an undistorted way. At master's level, I conducted an historical and contemporary study of UK Buddhist meditation centres. The ethnographical methodology involved charting the historic and contemporary development of meditation centres, participant observation in a range of centres, and semi-structured interviewing of monastic and lay teachers up and down the country. This experience introduced me to a range of research methods and the experience was highly informative and rewarding; in particular, I discovered that I enjoyed participant observation and interviewing people and was quite good at it. Early on in my research career, I realised that at heart I was a symbolic and humanistic theorist, and that my quest for knowledge lay in the direction of the meaning that humans ascribe to phenomena, and the feelings generated through ritual, more than with the structures that humans create.

Within the University, I have spent some years exploring the relationship between emotion and performance in organisational contexts, both as a lone and collaborative researcher. From 2010-2012 I created and acted as lead researcher on an insider research project investigating the experiences of students undergoing personal and professional development (PPD) and clinical training (Fixsen and Ridge, 2012). After completing this study, I was tasked with carrying out a secondary analysis of a similar study of a PPD programme, which involved negotiating and collaborating with the original team of researchers (Fixsen *et al.*, 2015). Both these studies were opportunities to develop my qualitative research and to employ dramaturgical theory in HE contexts.

1.2.1 Autoethnography

I regard my identity as a process in a constant state of construction and deconstruction (Barnett, 2005; Giddens, 1991), and a central aim of this study is to reflexively explore my own social and emotional identity and to challenge my own assumptions and boundaries. I interpret autoethnography as a means of personal and sociocultural inquiry, which describes and systematically analyses personal experience in order to understand cultural experience (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). What appeals to me about autoethnography is its combination of art form (Duncan, 2004), self-reflection and socio-political instrument. A further appeal is that autoethnography combines characteristics of autobiography and ethnography (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2010; Eastman and Maguire 2016). Previously I authored a more personal autoethnography (Fixsen, 2015) which was emotionally laden (Jewkes, 2012), highly intimate, and evocative in style (Ellis, 1999). For this doctoral study, to fit with my role as a co-partner in a community of learning and practice (Kelley, 2014), and to be more in line with traditional ethnography (Anderson, 2006), I employ a more interactive narrative, which includes dialogue with informants beyond myself, which was later interwoven into my main theoretical analysis (Anderson, 2006, p378). At the same time, I have not tried to separate out my feelings from other aspects of this study, including my interpretations of the experiences of others. As a trained and practising therapist, I regard openness to my own feelings, pleasant and painful, as a prerequisite to establishing an empathic connection with others, and for fostering self-knowledge and integration in myself. Be that as it may, I did not take on the role of autoethnographer lightly. In recent years I have faced significant challenges, including threats of redundancy and a long period of ill health, and am aware that these experiences have been instrumental in both my choice of topic and highly personal methodology. While I hold a constructive view of life encounters, regarding them as opportunities for personal growth, learning and career development, painful feelings may surface which need to be examined and shared with a critical audience, and this is not without its personal risks. Through autoethnography, I aim to both expand my own self awareness and to extend the use of this insightful and socially and politically astute

methodology (Ellis *et al.*, 2011) and to inform my own future development as a qualitative researcher.

1.3 Person centred skills and culture at University of Westminster

The University is a large and complex organisation, comprising 5 Academic Faculties and 29 Departments based in London, with over 22,000 students from over 150 nations, 956 permanent academic staff and 771 visiting lecturers (University of Westminster, 2015c). Its workforce covers a whole range of professional and support operations, each with both shared and differing pressures, developmental needs and goals (Watson, 2009, p46). The University emphasises its commitment to staff development and to developing a culture that supports and values personal and career development, including towards achieving the University of Westminster's goals (University of Westminster, 2016a). These interests and concerns are addressed by the provision of various initiatives provided through the Department of Human Resource Management (HRM), the Department of Organisational Development and Wellbeing (OD&W), through Staff Learning and Development and through the Centre for Resilience. At the time of writing (December 2016), the divisions Staff Learning and Development, and Leadership and Organisational Development, and their various subdivisions and advisory teams, sit under OD&W. Staff Learning and Development is further divided according to types of learning and development, including academic and research, blended learning and work-based learning divisions.

Developing an emotionally competent and resilient staff is embedded in the long-term organisational development strategy at the University. In their document 'The Westminster 2020 People Strategy: Valuing Our Staff Experience,' the authors elucidate the organisational aims and expectations concerning staff behaviours and skills, and their academic profile and organisational profile. According to this text, the Westminster 2020 strategy is supported by a commitment to 'enabling and empowering staff to grow through a high-quality staff experience' and to 'proactively developing and supporting staff to realise their full potential in a collaborative, open,

equitable and respectful working culture' (Harrison and Barratt, 2015). There are three maps in the strategy: an overall map, the People Strategy map, and the Cultural map mediating between the two. The strategy identifies a number of staff behaviours which contribute to the kind of 'high performing university' culture required to deliver its organisational aims, including being self-aware, empowered, business-like global citizens with a social conscience, commercially astute, culturally sensitive, dynamic, pragmatic and lifelong learners. Staff skills identified in these maps include; the ability to manage uncertainty, embrace new thinking and practices, maintain Continuing Professional Development (CPD), take and manage risks, work collaboratively, strive for excellence, and be fully proactive and engaged. To adopt and express these behaviours and skills, staff members need an encouraging organisational culture, which provides suitable training and staff development opportunities.

An ethical dimension is also reflected in the University of Westminster Competency Framework. This document outlines the behaviours expected of its employees to optimise the roles of all staff, based on the organisational values of generosity, connectedness, rigor and sustainability. The 2015/16 University of Westminster Organisational development plan (University of Westminster, 2015a) also embodied these aspirations through improving leadership capability; building the University of Westminster community; facilitating improvements in business performance; improving staff engagement; embedding work force planning; improving equality diversity and inclusion; contributing to the well-being agenda; continuing to embed performance management; and engaging with continuous improvement activities. Finally, in its vision, the University 2020 strategy lays much emphasis of the following values; courage, connectedness, generosity, excellence and sustainability (University of Westminster, 2016b), which overlap with the other competences or moral qualities outlined above.

Following the development of a new Corporate Strategy at the University, HRM

made it one of their key strategy objectives to ‘effect cultural change by placing emphasis on learning and development as a competitive advantage’ (Knight, 2011, p35). Cultural change-specific objectives included creating a corporate service identity, the breaking down of departmental walls, initiating joined business strategy and budgeting, and improving strategic thinking in leadership (2011, p36). In line with these objectives, the University employs a range of strategies for staff enhancement, both in terms of leadership and management, and learning and development. For example, as viewed in December 2016, the Westminster Learning and Development programme was offering staff from all sectors workshops and courses in a wide range of non-technical topics, including time management, developing personal resilience, coaching for managers, mindfulness for stress reduction, mental health awareness and same gender personal and professional development programmes. There are also various faculty based staff development activities and while this work was being undertaken, an extensive programme of workshops was offered to academic staff to prepare them for a major change initiative called Learning Futures. This programme started in 2012/13, and its specially recruited team worked in consultation with University staff towards the introduction of a revised undergraduate programme in September 2016.

1.4 Socio political context of LDPs

To give a wider perspective as to why HE staff training programmes emphasising soft skills have grown in scale and importance, and to acknowledge the contested nature of the terrain under research, I briefly consider the ideological and practical changes in HE workforce governance. Over the last two decades in HE, work demands in terms of skills sets and work mobility for employees have changed significantly, a trend which many authorities attribute to privatisation and the market driven policies (Treanor, 2005) of neoliberal governments (Shore, 2010; Peters, 2012; Giroux, 2002). According to Berg et al (2016) and others, the traditional culture of open intellectual enquiry and debate has been eroded in HE, to be replaced with a culture of ‘soft governance’ (Berg *et al.*, 2016) characterised by performance indicators, auditing and

accountability (Giroux, 2002; Olssen and Peters, 2005; Peters, 2001). Some go further and contend that soft governance describes a form of governance seemingly based on persuasion and advice, but where in reality no alternative to compliance may be offered (Brandsen *et al.*, 2006). Recent studies link aspects of neoliberalism with rising levels of anxiety and stress within academic communities (Berg *et al.*, 2015; Tytherleigh M. *et al.*, 2005; Gillespie *et al.*, 2001; Catano *et al.*, 2010). The use of the term neoliberalism is itself contentious, and some authorities critique the one sided, morally laden way in which it is often used (Venugopal, 2015). As Boas and Gans-Morse have observed, there has been in recent decades a shift in academic discourse towards the normative negativity of the term, within and beyond scholarly writing on development and political economy, whereas originally it had a positive association with moderation and liberalism (Boas and Gans-Morse, 2009).

Staff members are more likely to be diligent, dedicated and cheerful if they feel their professional and, to some extent, moral and emotional needs are being met by the organisation, and according to most HEI staff engagement surveys, university employees remain a pretty disaffected group (Watson, 2009). In 2015, 126 senior UK academics published an open letter in the Guardian online, referring to ‘unprecedented levels of stress among academic and academic related staff and students’ which they attributed to government legislation and micromanagement driven by senior management and management consultants employed by universities (Lesnick-Oberstein, *et al.*, 6 July 2015). As a sector, academics have generally been more vocal about their dislike of the ways that market competition has impacted on their traditional roles within universities than other sectors (Watts and Robertson, 2011; Watson, 2009; Berg *et al.*, 2015), while the ‘perks’ of academic life (such as relative flexibility of working practices) can be overlooked. In many ways, the shifting of workload within academia towards the administrative and managerial may not be matter for regret for all (Floyd and Dimmock, 2011; Whitchurch, 2008); some individuals cope well with or enjoy their new roles (Floyd and Dimmock, 2011) while the loosening of boundaries between academics and corporate service staff can create

mutual understanding and communication between these divisions.

1.4.1 Changes in HE

With the profound changes taking place in HE, supporting academic, corporate management and administrative staff through unstable times and inculcating a spirit of self-governance is now regarded as a human resource management (HRM) strategic priority. In 1997, the Dearing report was the first commissioned review of higher education to give attention to the development of HE staff (Dearing, 1997). The report acknowledged that at the 'heart' of a high calibre HE lies a fairly paid, motivated and professional workforce (p215) and that with growth in partnerships and collaborations between HE and the private and professional sector, traditional roles within HE need to be reinterpreted. To accommodate the restructuring of careers, fresh skills, in particular management and leadership skills, were required (p216-19). In 2001, the HEFCE 0/16 Initiative Rewarding and Developing Staff in Education (Staffordshire University, 2002) provided universities with an injection of funds towards the staff development budget, with the expectation that all universities would develop comprehensive HRM strategies. Shortly after this, the economic crisis brought home to universities the need for 'future proofing' through successful planning and development of a talent bank of internal staff in particular for future leadership. In 2010, the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE, 2010), proposed that, as the HE environment becomes more dynamic and competitive, strategic workforce planning would need to become a key priority for HE institutions. Two years previously (2008), a HEFCE-funded project 'creating success through wellbeing in higher education' www.wellbeing.ac.uk had been tasked with promoting collaborations and events across the sector to discover what is being done to support staff wellbeing in the sector, to share best practice and to facilitate more networking opportunities. Staff training, development, and career management have thus changed from a 'nice to do,' to a 'must do,' if universities are to gain a competitive advantage and meet student expectations (Noe, 2009). One consequence of this strategic imperative has been the considerable pressure on university HRM and Learning and

development departments lacking in-house resources, to ‘buy into’ privately run soft skills courses and programmes.

1.5 Soft skills

The various changes summarised above have placed HE institutions under pressure to plan, finance and provide a range of training programmes for staff on both personal and interpersonal skills and competences. What is sometimes referred to as the ‘soft stuff’ of management (good people management) can be seen as the most effective way of stimulating innovation and building competitive advantage, through employee engagement (Knight, 2012, p 40). In this study, the terms soft skills and competences are sometimes used in similar contexts but need to be distinguished, especially in professional and pedagogic contexts. Various definitions of soft skills can be found (Schulz, 2008; Mitchell *et al.*, 2010; Kyllonen, 2013), however a defining feature of the concept of soft skills is its emphasis on the individual’s ability to work more effectively, independently and with others, within the workplace. A striking characteristic of ‘soft skills’ is their emphasis on the affective (as opposed to purely cognitive or practical) domain. On many soft skills programmes feelings (including ‘gut feelings’ associated with intuition) are accepted as phenomena to be acknowledged and utilised, not dismissed or derided, albeit in an ‘emotionally intelligent’ way (McGurk, 2010). Soft skills also imply the presence of emotional intelligence, social and emotional skills associated with the accurate appraisal and expression of emotion in self and others, effective regulation of emotion self and others, and use of emotion or feelings to motivate plan and achieve in one’s life (Salovey and Mayer, 1989). Although development of some soft skills can arguably be achieved through individual and E-learning, these types of skills are most effectively developed and practised in groups, through discussion, case studies, games and role-play (Wats, 2009; Hromek and Roffey, 2009).

Emotional competence (EC) is a less explored but potentially important concept for this study, defined by Goleman (1999) as ‘a learned capability based on emotional

intelligence that results in outstanding performance at work' (p3). In a professional context, Boyatzis (1982) defines competences as those characteristics of a person that are causally related to effective and/or superior performance (p23). Emotional competences, as distinct from merely practical competences, have ethical and humanistic dimensions, such as trustworthiness, commitment and empathy (Goleman *et al.*, 2000). Although questions remain concerning the ability of some competences to be acquired (Bastian *et al.*, 2005; Fineman, 2006) or even desirable (Claxton, 2005) numerous studies have linked emotion-based competence with superior leadership skills (Antonakis *et al.*, 2009; Riggio and Reichard, 2008; Weinberger, 2009), enhanced decision making (Hess and Bacigalupo, 2011), personal and academic success (Romanelli *et al.*, 2006), better interpersonal relationships (Grant, 2007; Corcoran and Tormey, 2012) and wellbeing (Schutte *et al.*, 2002; Lomas *et al.*, 2014).

There is a growing expectation within organisations that all staff members, from senior down to customer facing staff (Development Economics, 2015; Mitchell *et al.*, 2010) demonstrate a range of personal and interpersonal skills such as being able to communicate well with others, demonstrate personal initiative, take responsibility for their own professional development, and generally appear motivated and engaged (Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008). A whole commercial sector has emerged that promotes these skills to organisations, HR departments and individuals, on the basis that within the new global market economy, holding a qualification and a set of hard skills does not guarantee job retention or career progression; people must also seek opportunities to expand their skills sets and career portfolios (Schulz, 2008; Robles, 2012; Dixon *et al.*, 2011). Collaborative teamwork and open discussion are seen as hallmarks of the enlightened, flexible workplace, and both employers and employees must respond accordingly (Sennett, 1998). With soft skills estimated to be worth over £88 billion per annum in Gross Value Added to the UK economy in 2015 (or 6.5% of total economy) deficits in these skills are regarded as having major consequences in terms of diminished productivity, profitability and competitive edge (Department of Economics, 2015).

1.5.1 Benefits of LDPs

Employee engagement refers to a commitment to the organisation and its values, combined with a willingness to help colleagues (organisational citizenship). As a work based approach, it is designed to ensure that employees are committed to their organisation and its values, help colleagues via organisational citizenship, contribute to its success and are able to enhance their own sense of wellbeing. Engagement goes beyond job satisfaction to mean something the employee chooses to offer; in other words it cannot be 'required' as part of the employment contract (CIPD, 2016). From the organisational perspective of improving employee attitudes and productivity, staff development initiatives that utilise positively oriented human resource strategies aimed at enhancing staff wellbeing may be more effective than initiatives directed towards performance targets (Baptiste, 2008; Day and Gu, 2007). Feedback from a 2008 University staff engagement survey recorded many requests for a greater and wider range of staff development opportunities (University of Westminster, 2010), which to a great extent appears to have been realised. In recognition of the organisational (as well as personal) value of these programmes and workshops, enrolment and attendance on LDPs is electronically logged on the University Personal and Professional Development (PPD) site. For new corporate service managers, leadership and management training involving soft skills is now mandatory, however many workshops and programmes are theoretically open to all staff across the University on a self-booking basis.

An aspect of staff engagement of relevance to this study is the use of self-development techniques. Many staff LDPs advocate self-development and self-care through instruction on techniques associated with mindfulness (Shapiro *et al.*, 1998; Bush, 2011; Barclay, 2009), resilience (Branch and Murray, 2008; Hromek and Roffey, 2009) and healthy work/life practices (Langley *et al.*, 1988; Zoller, 2003). The establishment of good interpersonal relationships and communication networks at work is also considered important to both individual and organisational wellbeing

(Reich and Hershcovis, 2011; Venkataramani *et al.*, 2013; Ferris *et al.*, 2009). As a means of alleviating or protecting against stress, LDP types of group-based interventions may feel more socially acceptable and less of a career risk than seeking out clinical and psychotherapeutic support within or through one's organisation (Chew-Graham *et al.*, 2003; Lomas *et al.*, 2017). There are also gender and diversity issues which personal and professional development courses purport to address, for instance by offering leadership programmes to female staff at middle management level and beyond. LDPs represent 'time out', a diversion from one's usual work routine and a chance to participate in a variety of sometimes unfamiliar learning activities, role-plays and games, which can be fun and reduce stress (Hromek and Roffey, 2009).

Studies of adult learning programmes suggest that they also act as vehicles for fostering different types of learning, such as deep and elaborative learning (Boyce *et al.*, 2001) and transformative learning (Cranton, 1997; Taylor, 2008; Mezirow, 1997). In addition to the above, experiential learning and development programmes are believed to have personal, idiosyncratic benefits, including facilitating self-awareness, underpinning resilience, developing healthy relationships between adult learners (Mezirow, 1991; Hromek and Roffey, 2009), inspiring personal insights (Kounios and Beeman, 2009) and promoting creativity and fun (Vieira, 2010). On the other hand, there are questions about how facilitators deal with the personal effects of emotion focused learning activities in adults which can leave people feeling exposed or vulnerable (Fisher-Yoshida *et al.*, 2009). Given the sensitive nature of some emotion-focused learning activities (such as sharing of personal values, hopes and fears) managers may need to provide learners with a robust holding environment or platform from which they can safely work.

1.5.2 Implications of LDPs

This study does not set out to explore the financial aspects of LDPs, however the cost and time implications of offering a wide range of programmes during the normal

working day has to be substantial. There are also problems of scale and prioritisation involved in supplying these types of courses. The University employs thousands of people who cover a wide range of professional and support operations, comprising senior management, academic staff, support services staff, researchers and more, and catering for the personal and professional development needs of all these categories of staff is an immense task, requiring much organisation and planning. Offering courses to staff does not guarantee that staff will attend, engage or benefit from these activities in any meaningful or long term way. There are likely to be factors which deter some staff from attending an LDP course, such as being too busy, failing to hear about certain courses, feeling insufficiently informed or motivated by the advert, or being disinclined to put in the extra time or effort required. On the affective level, relationships in the workplace are complex and often hierarchical, thus power struggles, personality clashes, trust and other issues can arise (Venkataramani *et al.*, 2013; D'Cruz and Noronha, 2011) within LDPs, and these are of importance to this study. In addition, there may be ideological reasons why academics in particular can be reluctant to engage in learning and development activities. Trained to be analytical, academics may be more inclined to dissect and unravel some of the concepts underpinning soft skills programmes, and may respond to these initiatives with suspicion and cynicism. These and other questions and concerns around LDPs are explored in this study.

1.6 Study Aims and Rationale

My aim is to investigate the experiences, perceptions and feelings of HE staff members, beginning with myself, who participated in LDPs thereby gaining insights into the *particular nature and functions* of LDPs. HE staff are human agents within large, complex and shifting organisational structures. I wish to explore how HE staff members, including myself, cope with, or 'feel' their way through the demanding and uncertain world of HE, and how our time on LDPs informs this process. To capture the social and emotional worlds of LDPs, I have focused on programmes that emphasise face-to-face, experiential activities. My rationale for choosing LDPs as a

means of observing and capturing emotionally meaningful experiences is based on my longstanding interest and personal observations of personal and interpersonal work, both as participant and researcher, along with my previous research into the emotional and developmental effects of these types of courses on undergraduate students. Much of what happens in working life can be taken for granted, and while LDPs may appear to cater for both individual and organisational requirements, there may well be contradictions and paradoxes between organisational drivers and governance and the human and professional needs of individuals, or unexpected and incidental consequences which may come to light in an ethnographic study. I begin this work with a conviction that this type of qualitative exploration into the less evident aspects of life and relationship building in HE can provide interesting, thought provoking and valuable insights which extend beyond the particular practices of the organisation, and the people within it.

What is meant by the term ‘organisation’ is contingent upon the way in which people within it view processes and people. Thus an organisation can be viewed as a division of work that is coordinated and controlled by management which produces a planned outcome, or as that which members create through their everyday practices (Klev and Levin, 2012). While I have used the word in both senses in this work, my project aims and ethos rest firmly with the latter definition of an organisation, as this perspective invites a more people-centred, democratic approach to organisational transformation (Klev and Levin, 2012). Previous studies of emotion in organisations suggest that qualitative investigations are useful adjuncts to other forms of staff evaluation and needs assessments, and encourage decision makers to be more aware and responsive to the human realities of organisational life (Huffington *et al.*, 2004). LDPs, I suggest provide an apposite window through which to investigate the affective side of university life, and examine its function and significance. Through exploring these programmes I can offer a unique staff level perspective on personal/professional development, including some of the deeper meanings, purposes and socio-political issues underpinning soft skills development. In the process, I aim to develop my own

research-based pedagogic work and commence the construction of a participant led conceptual framework for future development of personal and professional learning and training (for staff and students). I am aware that maintaining my independence as a researcher within my own university may present challenges. For example, I anticipate that this work may call into question some existing assumptions about human resource development strategies and governance in HE, raising questions about how things might become different. To ensure that my findings are balanced and representative, I aim to approach my subject area from as broad a perspective as time permits, and my ethnographic fieldwork will include careful observation and personal participation in LDPs, and discussions and interviews with as wide a range of stakeholders in LDPs (managers, participants, and facilitators) as possible.

My purpose is not to evaluate the content of the courses themselves, although my findings may identify factors that motivate staff to attend LDPs and factors acting as deterrents. By examining the experiences of participants and myself around staff LDPs, I aim to explore a largely uncharted dimension of modern university life, including the relationships and areas of tension that might exist for this genre of learning and development within the workplace and their associations with the wider social, political and cultural context in which they operate. By examining this cultural and emotional dimension of university, I aim to offer insights into the nature and function of these processes, to improve my own professional practice and to collaborate with others in designing and promoting transformative learning and wellbeing practices including through further research, within and beyond my own institution.

In addition to these wider aims, there are more immediate practical objectives to this study, which align with personal and institutional goals. Like other HE organisations in the UK and beyond, the University is under constant pressure to train and prepare staff (and students) for frequent and often rapid policy changes. As I explained in my introduction, this study, coincided with the introduction of the new Learning Futures

programme at University which has not only introduced new learning and development strategies for both staff and students but has been accompanied by new frameworks which include new definitions of both staff and graduate attributes. Another important policy document, The 'Westminster 2020 People Strategy: Valuing our staff experience' states its ethical intention as being to 'provide a vibrant global learning environment that inspires the next generation of world citizens and helps to shape a better future for all.' Findings from this study and their conceptual framework will therefore be interpreted within the context of this organisational ethos and the impact on policy changes with study participants, and will be shared with stakeholders with this context in view.

In my personal sphere of influence, information and insights gleaned from the study on soft skills and LDPs can be used to inform the design and development of newly created or newly validated cross-disciplinary undergraduate modules, and short courses for external students and staff. Critical discussion of findings and their implications have already taken place with various stakeholders within the university including within HR Organisational Development and Wellbeing (OD&W), Leadership and Development (L&D) and other learning support teams, and these can inform thinking and planning around staff development and staff support. I anticipate that at least some of my findings, theory and the discussions points generated by this study, such as those that are concerned with experiential learning and staff wellbeing, can be widely applied within and beyond HE. For instance, the qualitative data from this study can give insights into what participants really gain from different elements of LDPs, why some people chose or refuse to engage with them and benefits and drawbacks of internally delivering or outsourcing soft skills learning and development initiatives. From a socio-political perspective, this study can also help to identify and bring to light tensions between market and organisational demands and human needs as people respond to new workplace pressures including those of up skilling and competence building. Through disseminating my findings through seminars, education and business conferences and peer reviewed papers the more theoretical

and practically transferable aspects of my findings can potentially have a far wider impact.

Main research questions

- How do academic and customer service staff members, including myself, who attend LDPs, perceive their experiences of LDPs, within the organisational framework, including in relation to their own professional and emotional needs?
- What purposes do these programmes serve for staff members, who participate in or organise them, including the ways they navigate their way through the modern workplace?
- What insights can be gained from an autoethnographic perspective on LDPs concerning the relationship/ tensions between needs of staff, institutional targets and wider social and market forces?
- With regard to modern HE organisations, what insights can be gleaned from this ethnographic study concerning the way things are, and how they might become different?
- A broader question concerns the extent to which LDPs can mitigate the gross effects of work stress and promote wellbeing, while serving the demands of new managerialist agendas, and the potential paradoxes they encompass as a result.

1.6.1 Research objectives

To achieve the main objectives of my study I will:

- Ethnographically explore a range of facilitated soft skills activities offered through LDPs, including gender specific personal and professional development courses, leadership programmes, coaching and mentoring programmes, experiential workshops and other non-technical staff training events

- Investigate staff experiences and perceptions of such courses, including the use of experiential learning via role-play and other simulations
- Identify the group processes and emotion work that take place during these soft skills training
- Explore the idiosyncratic consequences of participating in interactive soft skills activities, including significant experiences, emotional challenges and insights discussed by participants in the study
- Complete a professionally accredited coaching and mentoring course, as a primary vehicle for my autoethnographic approach and for professional development
- Contribute to the creation of a framework for good practices concerning staff development and wellbeing programmes and initiatives which can be used by internal stakeholders and as the foundation for wider collaborative work

1.7 Significance of this study

In this section, I outline some of the ways in which I believe this work is important to the organisation. Usher explains how professional doctorates have a strong role to play in improving the workplace and professional practice in innovative ways (Usher, 2002). Gaps in research remain concerning the conceptualisation of the goals of LDP programmes and their impact on the feelings and consequent attitudes of HE staff (Parsons et al., 2012, p43) which this study hopes to address. For example, in May 2012, the HEA requested HOST Policy Research (HOST) to conduct an intensive review of the impact of teaching development programmes in higher education, however the emotional dimension of teaching was barely mentioned in their report (Parsons *et al.*, 2012). As a professional doctorate candidate, I aim to expand knowledge and theory, but also raise practice oriented questions concerning a rapidly expanding area of staff learning and development, that has substantial cost and labour implications to my own organisation. What Huffington et al (2004) refer to as the ‘psychological contract’ between an organisation and its employees has changed in the last few decades. Contemporary organisations (or their managers), including at the

University, now have to consider what they can do for staff, as well as what staff can do for them (p31). The success of learning and development programmes for staff relies on effective matching of programme materials and activities to staff preferences and personal and professional goals, and this requires a sound understanding of one's clientele (in this case one's staff). The views of staff within the University are frequently sought through staff evaluation surveys and course evaluation, while training needs are matched through analysis of aggregate data via the University's Personal and Professional Development Review Process (PPDR). Yet, as earlier studies have proved, (Huffington *et al.*, 2004), qualitative research aimed at understanding staff hopes, needs and problems can be a highly useful addition to other forms of evaluation or gap analysis research, and can enable decision makers and managers to be better 'fine tuned' to the human realities of their organisation. Given my background and interests, and as an insider researcher with an academic ear, I believe I am particularly well placed to give voice to the affective and experiential dimensions of both teaching and administration, and to share this with stakeholders in corporate services and other areas of staff learning development. By sharing emerging findings of this qualitative research with stakeholders on an iterative basis, and potentially widening and challenging stakeholders' perceptions and assumptions concerning LDPs and their relation to staff experiences, this work could act as a powerful tool in helping to inform future strategic and operational thinking.

As an academic institution, the University aims to contribute to new bodies of knowledge and inquiry. While the performance management side of learning and development has been extensively explored (Armstrong and Baron, 2005; Gruman and Saks, 2011; Lebas, 1995; Haines and St-Onge, 2012), the bulk of literature concerning the ideologies and theory underpinning soft skills in HE is rhetorical or anecdotal, and this study can contribute to more scholarly discourses on this topic. With the exception of professional doctoral work undertaken by students seeking to influence their own practice (Morley and Petty, 2010) and action research (Coghlan, 2007; Lysø *et al.*, 2011), most of the research coming out of universities is external

facing, possibly because academics are not encouraged or motivated to examine their own contributions to staff development. Many studies in the field of emotional health and wellbeing in organisations have focused on emotional stress and in particular the association between emotional stress and emotional labour, burnout and health problems (Griffith *et al.*, 1999; Chang, 2009; Tatar and Horenczyk, 2003). Investigations focusing on soft skills programmes for staff (Boyce *et al.*, 2001; Schulz, 2008; Musa *et al.*, 2012; Zhang, 2012), mostly indicated positive changes such as in learning (Boyce *et al.*, 2001) and behaviours (Charoensap-Kelly *et al.*, 2016). Very few studies to date, however, involved HE staff (Junrat *et al.*, 2014; Ngang *et al.*, 2013), and none have featured both academic and corporate service staff in UK universities or used autoethnography to focused on the culture of soft skills staff development and self-care within an HE institution. This qualitative study aims to address such gaps in the knowledge and understanding of soft skills, provide insights into face-to-face learning derived from staff experiences, and encourage debates around the effects of the drive for modernisation and change within HE upon individuals in those institutions (Sennett, 1998) based on a particular case.

Research impact is defined by Research Councils UK (RCUK) as 'the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy' (Research Council, 2016). This is generally based on outputs of a practical, academic or creative nature, which are properly documented and disseminated. The RCUK identifies two principle forms of research impact (2016). Academic impact is that which makes a demonstrable contribution to science, across and within disciplines and advances, or advances understanding, method, theory and application, while research with economic and social impact makes an excellent contribution to society and economy, thereby benefiting individuals, organisations and nations. The impact of a project may be social, cultural or economic (Bornmann, 2013). I anticipate the following outputs to have an internal educational and cultural impact, in terms of generating interest and debate around staff learning and development, peer support

and continued professional development (CPD), informing internal decision making and leading on to more targeted action and research within the university;

1. Critical discussion of project findings and their implications to take place with various stakeholders within the university including HR Learning and development and Learning support teams, as a vehicle for sharing and considering of how results can be best interpreted and utilised
2. Presentations of relevant aspects of my findings to HR and OD&W teams, to present an overview of project data, and to contribute to future thinking and development of LDPs
3. Summary report on findings and recommendations to be submitted in 2016/17 for HRM, OD&W and other faculty learning and development stakeholders, to include a conceptual overview of the 'social world' functions of LDPs, as a means of informing future thinking and planning related to staff development, engagement and well-being
4. Incorporation of successful experiential learning practices in newly designed or redesigned undergraduate modules and staff development workshops
5. Published work to be deposited immediately in Westminster Research, the University's online digital archive for electronic copies of research and scholarly work

The term, 'Third Stream activity' has been used to describe research associated with the generation, use, application and exploitation of knowledge and other university capabilities outside of the academic environment (Molas-Gallart *et al.*, 2002). Typically universities carry out three main sets of activities; teaching, research and communication of the results of their work. Any of these activities can be considered Third Stream when the work has social impact within the non-academic community (2002). I anticipate that the findings of this study could, by being shared with a wider audience, generate debate with educational, cultural and social implications. Outputs of this study, which can create external impact include:

1. Presentation of work at national and international conferences
2. Submission of peer reviewed papers to high quality peer review journals
3. Development of future collaborative projects on LDPs, which could be replicated outside of my organisation

1.8 Summary

Soft skills programmes are an accepted part of the range of development schemes for HEI staff, largely run or commissioned by the organisations' HRM services, yet research concerning the full range of staff experiences undertaking these types of programmes was found to be lacking. An extensive range of learning and development programmes (LDPs) is available for both academic and corporate staff within my own university, however no in depth qualitative research into these programmes has yet been undertaken. This autoethnographic study can address such gaps in the knowledge and understanding of soft skills, provide insights into face-to-face learning derived from staff experiences, and encourage wider and new debates around the effects of the drive for modernisation and change within HE upon individuals in those institutions (Sennett, 1998) based on a particular case. In this chapter I have introduced my subject area, my work context, and myself and explained what I aim to achieve through this work and why I consider it to be of value and importance. In the following chapter, I explore the relevant literature on this subject area, including some of the topics touched on in this introduction.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The subject area I have chosen to explore, adult learning and development, is very broad. My research approach could be described as intuitive, since as suggested in my title I was ‘feeling my way’ into my subject matter, using literature as a means of identifying what was already known and written, but more importantly, what appeared to me to be taken for granted, oblique and overlapping in the literature on LDPs. The approach is based on grounded theory in that I frequently revisited, added to and removed literature as more findings were gathered and insights gleaned from them. What I present here represents a synthesis of the literature around ‘soft learning’ (my term) gathered from different disciplines, including psychology, sociology, anthropology, education and the business world. In this it reflects my own holistic world-view, but also the complex and cross-disciplinary nature of my subject matter.

2.1 Structure of review

This review is divided into the 9 main sections. Section 2.2 explores the literature on soft skills, and its relationship with emotion and competency building as largely emerging from organisational theory and business psychology. Section 2.3 critically examines the development and rationale of soft skills from a socio-political perspective. During the process of this work, a number of questions arose for me concerning the nature and function of LDPs, and their effects on staff members as actors who participate in them. For example, what forces lie behind the soft skills drive, and who benefits from this? Given that universities are driven by political and economic forces, what is the relationship between the soft skills drive and changes in higher education concerning role hybridisation, self-governance and accountability? To answer such questions, sections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 examine critical discourses on new capitalism and neoliberalism. Section 2.4 then considers the effects of neoliberal policies on university life, including the emphasis on accountability, job flexibility and self-governance. While Foucault was writing in a different era, his theses on bio-power and self-care are relevant to my findings and I introduce them in section 2.5. In

section 2.6, I turn to practice-based literature on performance management, which include the aims and rationale of performance management largely from the organisational perspective. I have focused on three areas of performance management prominent in the LDP world, and with which study participants and myself engaged: the 360-degree review process, coaching and leadership.

Up to section 2.7 of this review, competency development and self-care are considered from individual, socio-political or organisational perspectives. However, as a social researcher, I am primarily interested in LDPs as social events, and the role of relationship building and group ritual in this process. In section 2.7 and its subsections I focus on the area of interpersonal relationships, sense of belonging and embodiment, turning to the psychology and social science literature for this purpose. Group competency effect is a phenomenon I have considered in previous studies, and I re-examine this in the light of my present interests and experiences. In section 2.8, I turn to an area of particular conceptual interest, that of interaction ritual, symbolism and emotion. I started this exploration with the work of Durkheim (1912) and Goffman (1959, 67), later adding to its content and refining my arguments in the light of my findings. Finally, in section 2.9, I consider the types of activities taking place in LDPs in the light of experiential and transformative learning theory. After reviewing theory on transformative learning and considering the experiences of LDPs I am left with this fundamental question: is it individuals within LDP social worlds or the entrepreneurial culture in which they work which needs to change?

2.2 Soft skills

Soft skills are a set of non-domain specific skills which include self related, interpersonal, people or behavioural skills (Weber *et al.*, 2013; McGurk, 2010), seen as complementing the use of technical knowledge and ‘hard’ skills in the workplace. These skills are generally believed to help individuals to successfully navigate the requirements, challenges and opportunities of their job role in pursuit of personal, team or organisational goals (Heckman and Kautz, 2012; McGurk, 2010). Early

references to soft skills date back to leadership research for the U.S. Army by Fry and Whitmore (Charoensap-Kelly *et al.*, 2016), who used the term to define job-related skills that could be applied in a variety of job contexts, and involved little or no interaction with machines (Human Resources Research Organisation, 1974). Kamin (2013) traces the soft skills ‘revolution’ back to the humanist and alternative education movements, which in the 1960’s and 70’s challenged the emotionally repressive position of the status quo by teaching personal growth in universities and community colleges in the US and elsewhere (such as the University of Massachusetts School of Education and the Esalen Institute) (Kamin 2013).

Since the 1990’s the idea of soft skills as skills sets has been systematically applied and studied in a wide range of contexts, including as student and graduate skills (Kermis and Kermis, 2011; Devadason *et al.*, 2010; Nikitina and Furuoka, 2012), employee skills (Dixon *et al.*, 2011; Kyllonen, 2013) and leadership skills (Ariratana *et al.*, 2015; Ngang, 2012). Soft skills can be grouped under six key clusters; communication skills; decision-making and problem-solving skills, self-management skills; teamwork skills, professionalism skills, and leadership skills (Crawford *et al.*, 2011). Despite their importance in almost every 21st century work sector, employers in business continually report that business employees are deficient in soft skills (Development Economics, 2015; Mitchell *et al.*, 2010).

2.2.1 Soft skills and emotion

A significant feature of soft skills (and one important to this study) is their focus on the affective domain (Laker and Powell, 2011) and emphasis on personal wellbeing and relationships (Kermis and Kermis, 2011; Robles, 2012). Feelings are ubiquitously experienced and exercise a decisive influence in our working life, affecting how we communicate with others, how we make decisions and whether we choose to engage in particular work-based activities. The attempt to define emotion and feeling has led to much discourse within different traditions and bodies of literature, and the debate as to whether emotions are largely self-activated/ determined or socially defined/

enacted goes back to Darwin or earlier (Hess and Thibault, 2009). In the 1930's, Duffy and others questioned the value of 'emotion' as a scientific term, as it could not communicate a set of predictable features (Gendron, 2010, p371), and advocated instead that the concept of emotion be studied in terms of discrete elements (anger, fear, joy, disgust, surprise, sadness) (Cabanac and Cabanac, 2002). Finding a scientific framework to distinguish between one emotion and another, or between emotion and cognition, has proved difficult. Some cognitive theorists, for example, insist that emotions contain cognitive components and study them from this perspective (Izard, 1992; Ochsner and Gross, 2005; Izard, 2009). Equally contested are the mechanisms involved in the formation of emotion, and whether emotion is based on culture (constructivist view) biology (natural view), or is epigenetic (Mason and Capitanio, 2012), with genetic mechanisms mediating the impact of emotional reactivity (Pishva *et al.*, 2014). As a subfield, the sociology of emotion has existed for less than half a decade (Turner, 2009), and there is still surprisingly little in the way of concrete analysis of specific emotional ideologies, vocabularies and rules (Stets and Turner, 2008). Part of the reason for its late emergence is that early sociology was decidedly macro focused, and the foundation work of symbolic interactionists Herbert Mead and others was relatively devoid of conceptualising around emotion (Turner, 2009). In the 1970's and 80's this emphasis changed, beginning with Arnie Hochschild (Hochschild, 1975) and was followed by an flurry of empirical research on emotional experiences in relation to culture, social structure and workplace practices (Thoits, 1996, 1989, Hochschild, 1979, 1983; Ashforth, 1993).

Although sometimes used interchangeably in this study, it is important to attempt to differentiate between the terms 'feelings,' 'emotions' and 'affect.' Feelings, Shouse argues, are personal and biographical whereas emotions are social, and affects are 'pre-personal' (Shouse, 2005). Each person has a distinct set of previous sensations from which they draw, interpret and label their feelings. Feelings can also be seen as the dynamic component of emotion and are related to the biological process known as 'entrainment' (Izard, 2009), a concept which has been also employed by interaction

ritual theorists (Collins, 2004; von Scheve *et al.*, 2014). Allied but distinguishable from emotion, affect is quite an abstract term and is to do with the body's way of unconsciously preparing itself for action and our ability to feel and respond (Shouse, 2005). First experienced in the body, affect is then named and authenticated through social relations and culture (Zembylas, 2010).

2.2.2 Emotion-based competences

When referring to personal and interpersonal skills in organisational learning and development, the term 'competences' tends to be favoured over the more graduate degree or training oriented idioms 'hard skills' and 'soft skills' (Epstein and Hundert, 2002; Jennings and Greenberg, 2009). While competences are also skills, Boyatzis makes a definitive link between competences in work contexts and the effective or superior performance of a job (p23). In his seminal work 'The Competent Manager' (1982), Boyatzis extends the idea of professional competences to include the individual and personal, however in this text, no mention is made of emotion-based competences. Later, through amalgamating and developing their respective theories and findings on emotional intelligence and professional competences, Goleman, Boyatzis and Ree (2000) developed an emotional competency inventory framework, comprising clusters and subtypes of emotional competences, testing out the validity of this framework on individuals via interviews and questionnaires (Goleman *et al.*, 2000). Their framework comprises six core clusters; self-awareness (including emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment and self-confidence), self-regulation (including self-control, adaptability, trustworthiness, conscientiousness and innovation), motivation (including achievement drive, commitment and optimism), empathy (including understanding others, service orientation, diversity awareness and political skills) and social skills (including leadership, communication, conflict management, team collaboration and team building) (Goleman *et al.*, 2000).

2.2.3 The economics of soft skills

The need to train staff in soft skills (Charoensap-Kelly *et al.*, 2016; McGurk, 2010) and emotional competencies can be viewed as part of a necessary and expanding demand for new skills sets associated with technological growth, expansion of a global communication infrastructure, an ageing labour force and growth of the knowledge economy (Cukier *et al.*, 2009). Issues such as the Mid Staffordshire scandal and the subsequent Francis Inquiry Report brought home the priority of an emotionally competent workforce for the safety and welfare of the organisation and wider society (Francis, 2013). Emotional competences are reported to improve an individual's relationships and performance, and increase their productivity (Goleman, 1998; Goleman *et al.*, 2000). Drawing on and linking the Bordieusian constructs of habitus and capital (Bourdieu, 1977) with theories concerning emotional intelligence (EI) and emotional competences, Gendron (2005) proposes the idea of 'emotional capital' as both a concept for understanding a person's success or failure, career prospects and organisational institutional success (p1), and a set of emotion-based resources (p9). An example might be a manager who is able to manage their own emotions, and deal effectively with the emotions of others at work, and thereby enhance efficiency, quality and productivity in the workplace (Gendron, 2005, p17). Emotional competences can, it is argued, be learned and improved (Goleman, 1998; Gendron, 2005) and emotional capital cultivated through competency training. These types of discourse have had enormous influence on learning and development both in education (Humphrey *et al.*, 2010; Hromek and Roffey, 2009) and the business world (Charoensap-Kelly *et al.*, 2016; McGurk, 2010).

Associations made between emotional intelligence and emotional competences, and 'success' and 'goodness,' can be critiqued for their moral ambiguity or naivety (Fineman, 2006; Grant, 2013; Antonakis *et al.*, 2009). Emotional Intelligence (EI) can have a darker side such as when the ability to interpret or manipulate the emotions of others is used for sinister ends or to exert power over people in a vulnerable position (Kilduff *et al.*, 2010). Nor is the evidence that EI is associated with helping others

entirely clear; in a study of staff relationships in a healthcare company Grant (2013) found no relationship whatsoever between emotional intelligence and helping; helping was associated with people's motivations and values and not with their abilities to understand and manage emotions. Emotional intelligence was, however, of consequence for more self-oriented behaviours, such as challenging members of the group and putting forward new ideas and suggestions (Grant, 2013).

2. 3 Socio-political context of soft skills development

Training of staff in personal and interpersonal skills, or 'soft skills,' is now a widely accepted requirement within most organisations (Kermis and Kermis, 2011; Kyllonen, 2013; Economics, 2015), including universities (Williams, 2015; Junrat *et al.*, 2014). What amounts to a major cultural shift has taken place in the conceptualisation of the modern work role with emphasis on merit, talent, individualised, entrepreneurial skills and self-care, replacing that on craftsmanship, intellectual rigour and collectivism (Clarke and Knights, 2015; Knights and Clarke, 2013; Tudor, 2012; Dilts, 2011). Understanding this cultural trend is of considerable importance to this study, as it influences the rationale, design, marketing and delivery of staff LDPs. It also suggests that to understand their nature, LDPs should be viewed in conjunction with other neoliberal governance practices prevalent in HE (Shore, 2010; Berg *et al.*, 2016; Giroux, 2002). In this section, I examine what I regard as important critical discourses on new capitalism and neoliberalism and their association with employee well-being and skills development in HE. Neoliberalism is a complex and morally loaded concept (Venugopal, 2015; Kingfisher and Maskovsky, 2008), with a sprawling taxonomy of definitions and uses (Flew, 2014). Many modern problems have been laid at its door (Berg *et al.*, 2016; Olssen and Peters, 2005; Peters, 2012), including the 'endless exploitation' of human capital (Bourdieu, 1998). Drawing on Foucault and other critics of neoliberalism from sociological perspectives, I focus on three features of our market driven society that have a specific bearing on staff learning and development and wellbeing: individualisation and self-entrepreneurism; 'biopower' and 'techniques of the self;' and the management of emotion in the workplace.

2.3.1 New Capitalism and neoliberalism

The term ‘capitalism’ broadly refers to a set of practices whose aim is the accumulation of capital and investment to make a profit, which for Marx and Weber was characterised by the wage-earning class (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005; Weber, 2010). In the capitalist system, most people have little or no capital, and derive their income from selling their labour. Since the 1970’s, a new form of capitalism has emerged to supersede the fixed and static bureaucracies of old capitalism. Under ‘new capitalism’ (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005; Sennett, 2006; Mok, 2001) a ‘softer’ and more individualistic type of governance is necessitated (Brandsen *et al.*, 2006; Tudor, 2012), with managers taking on a significant networking and visionary role, coaches (and sometimes managers) being tasked with developing the skills of the people in the organisation (Sennett, 2006; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005, p81), and employees becoming more personally accountable for their own care and wellbeing (Dilts, 2011). Individualism has brought with it a new (and arguably illusory) sense of personal freedom, but also one of personal entitlement, which Taylor (1991) asserts, ‘both flattens and narrows our lives, makes them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others or society’ (p4).

In the 1930’s the concept of ‘neoliberalism’ emerged as an economic philosophy among European liberal scholars, but became associated with the deregulated free market and privatisation policies espoused by Thatcher and Reagan in the late 1970’s and 80’s (Babb, 2006; Hall, 2011; Peters, 2012). In a similar vein to new capitalist ethics, the neoliberal perspective regards marketeering and individual entrepreneurship as essential to economic development and growth (Cotoi, 2011; Foucault, 2008a). The promise of neoliberalism is that the individual will be the winner in this (as in the ‘you can be whatever you want’ message), but in a freely competitive world, only a few become victors. By dismantling the social nets that protect individuals, neoliberal policies have, critics argue, left individuals responsible for their own welfare and powerless against corporate exploitation (Tudor, 2012, p2)

leading to a greater uncertainty and an erosion of stability and trust within the workplace (Sennett, 2006). Short term contracts and flexible work practices mean that people nowadays may be construed as having more ‘freedom’ to move from job to job, yet with ‘freedom’ has gone the concept of a lasting career (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005; Sennett, 1998) along with traditional and more enduring work relationships (Le Goff, 1999; Garcia, 2000; Petersen, 2004), to be replaced by the treatment of employees as something disposable (Sennett, 1998; Peters, 2001). In the process, ‘homo oeconomicus’ has ceased to be one of two partners in the process of exchange (Foucault, 2008a). To use Foucault’s terminology, they have become the ‘entrepreneur of the self’ (Peters, 2001; Dilts, 2011; Kelly *et al.*, 2007; Foucault, 2008a), whose distinctiveness and self drive (such as through acquiring leadership skills or latterly promoting themselves on social media) gives them the competitive edge over others within organisations and society (Tudor, 2012).

Others present a more functionalist view of the relationship between the individual and work in post-modernist society (Archer, 2012; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) distinguish between the neo-liberal idea of the free-market individual and the authors’ concept of individualisation. Individualisation relates to basic social rights and also paid employment and is a structural characteristic of highly differentiated societies, which, far from imperilling social cohesion, actually makes it possible. As institutions have become destabilised, the individual has become more mobile or ‘nomadic,’ and must exercise more reflective judgement over decisions they make in the workplace (2002). While these factors increase uncertainty and risk, they also leave the door open to more innovation (2002) resulting in a more self-reflexive society (Archer, 2012). Yet genuine reflexivity and autonomy, Petersen (2004) argues, must be actively selected by the individual him or herself. Under the neoliberal social order, the individual must constantly act out ‘pseudo-individualism’ and ‘pseudo-autonomy’ while being denied any alternative *modus operandi* (Petersen, 2004, p342).

2.3.2 Authenticity and neoliberalism

The term authenticity is used in a number of different contexts in this project, and therefore deserves consideration. The Greek word '*authenteo*,' means 'to have full power over,' also, even 'to kill' (Trilling, 1971; Vannini and Franzese, 2008) which suggests that an individual has complete control over themselves or their subject. In this part, I consider the origins of the modern denotation of authenticity and its relationship with neoliberal culture and ideology. Later in this chapter, when I turn to the topic of social interaction, I consider authenticity from the perspective of actors negotiating impression management in professional contexts. Authenticity is a promoted, even taken-for-granted value in contemporary life, but in many ways it is a modern, western cultural invention (Rapport, 2009; Vannini and Williams, 2009). The modern 'ethic of authenticity' (Taylor, 1989, 1991) can be traced back to a culture of individualism as it emerged in 17th and 18th-centuries, and to the subsequent work of Rousseau (House *et al.*, 1995), Kierkegaard (Kierkegaard, 1835), Heidegger and others (Trilling, 1971; Taylor, 1991; Varga, Somogy and Guignon, 2016; Taylor, 2001). One influence noted by Varga, Somogy and Guignon (2016) is the individualism of disengaged rationality established by Rene Descartes (1596-1650), who proposed a radical notion of the self-responsible, solitary self (Varga, Somogy and Guignon, 2016). Another philosophical idea - that each of us has an original way of being - can be traced back to the work of Johann Herder (1744-1803) (Forster, 2015), but has likewise penetrated deep into modern consciousness. What is characteristic of the neoliberal culture of individualism (although not historically unique) is that it has rendered self-interestedness a virtue. In his treatise on what he calls the 'malaise of modernity,' the philosopher Charles Taylor (1991) critiques the ethical meaning and purpose of authenticity among the 'me generation' of the post war western world, and what is termed 'soft relativism;' that is, the view that everyone has his or her own set of values independent of their social background. This particular subjective interpretation of human responsibility and self-fulfilment is, according to some social philosophers (Guignon, 2008; Taylor, 1991), a morally degraded form of authenticity, that is linked to the unbounded drive of modern

capitalism (Bell, 1978). An over-zealous preoccupation with self has created a dangerous narcissism, characterised by deficient empathic skills, self-indulgence and self-absorbed behaviour (Lasch, 1980). What has been termed an ‘authenticity business’ (Wilson, 2011) has emerged in various work sectors, including soft skills development, to capitalise on this modern imperative to ‘be yourself’.

2.4 Neoliberalism in HE

I now turn to the increasing focus on developing soft skills, and the coinciding of this with accelerated change within organisations, including universities. Over the last two decades, universities have had to amend their identity from state-financed monopolies to self-financed knowledge and entrepreneurial production markets (Czarniawska and Genell, 2002; Kallio *et al.*, 2015). The result has been an escalation of managerial practices (Massan, 2003), which some believe has been at the expense of traditional academic values (Kallio *et al.*, 2015; Peters, 2012). Qualitative studies of administrative staff experiences in HE (Graham, 2012; Szekeres, 2006; Whitchurch, 2008) suggest that these employees have also been required to reconfigure their roles within and beyond a corporate university, as universities perform against government targets (Kolsaker, 2008). While some staff (chiefly those in leadership and management positions (Floyd and Dimmock, 2011) may in terms of status and career prospects have gained from this situation, for many faculty staff, including middle ranking academics (Floyd, 2015; Watts and Robertson, 2011), such changes have led to a more stressful and unsatisfactory work situation. Berg et al (2016) point to a number of factors, which when taken together, have created a feeling of precariousness and anxiety among academics (p1-13). First, neoliberal policies have led to a shift from exchange to competition as being the main driving force of HE policies. This in turn has prompted the increasing emphasis on performance targets and audit-induced competition (Giroux, 2002; Olssen and Peters, 2005; Peters, 2001), with entrepreneurial models of research generation, intellectual property control, and academic institutional management being imposed throughout higher education systems (Levin and Greenwood, 2013). Over time, the traditional culture of open

intellectual enquiry and debate has been eroded in universities, to be replaced with a culture of ‘soft governance’ with the role of the senior academics reconfigured as key performers in an organisational management structure (Winter, 2009; Berg *et al.*, 2015; Floyd and Dimmock, 2011). As a result, the relationships among and between faculty staff have become more, rather than less, hierarchical and unequal. By conceptualising staff members as part of the pool of human capital, neoliberal universities have been able to reward or dispose of staff largely in relation to the meeting of key performance targets (e.g. RAE/ REF targets) (Berg *et al.*, 2015).

2.4.1 Attitudes of HE staff

Competitive and ‘quick win’ thinking has eroded the supportive relationship between individual academic and institution, and led to increased apprehension and dissatisfaction among university staff (Giroux, 2002; Olssen and Peters, 2005; Peters, 2001; Kallio *et al.*, 2015). Several studies of university lecturers indicate that they feel exposed to a high degree of stress (Winefield and Jarrett, 2001; Biron *et al.*, 2008; Catano *et al.*, 2010; Tytherleigh M. *et al.*, 2005; Lesnick-Oberstein, 2015), with psychological distress highest and job satisfaction lowest among academic staff engaged in teaching and research in Winefield and Jarrett’s study. At the same time, university careers have become hybridised, with the shifting back and forth pattern of career paths for university staff (Locke, 2013) now a well-recognised phenomenon (Lam and O’Higgins, 2012; Floyd and Dimmock, 2011; Floyd and Morrison, 2014; Whitchurch and Gordon, 2013). A key question for universities then is how authentic, mutual loyalties and commitments in their workforce can be sustained when organisational structures are constantly being reordered, or being redesigned (Sennett, 1998, p9) and where staff members feel they face their futures within it with greater uncertainty.

In the field of higher education, the increasingly customer-driven approach means that university staff members, particularly customer facing staff, are expected to be culturally and emotionally adept, without the necessary incentive or training to be so

(Gillespie *et al.*, 2001; Winefield and Jarrett, 2001; Catano *et al.*, 2010; Tatar and Horenczyk, 2003). In one study, being exposed to high levels of contact with students, and being young, middle ranking and working in newer institutions, were particularly associated with staff burnout (Watts and Robertson, 2011). Added to this is the increasing expectation that staff at all levels can effectively communicate with students (and other staff) from a diverse range of backgrounds. Tatar and Horenczyk (2003) use the term ‘diversity-related burnout’ to explain the negative impact on teachers of coping with culturally diverse students on a daily basis (Tatar and Horenczyk, 2003). On the other hand, the ability to manage different emotional scenarios in the classroom is arguably fundamental to a lecturer’s sense of professional identity (Day and Gu, 2007). In Sutton’s study of emotional regulation in middle school teachers, all but one believed that regulating their emotions helped their teaching effectiveness goals and/or conformed to their idealised emotion image of a teacher (Sutton, 2004). In addition, promoting (rather than imposing) positive attitudes and courteous behaviours in the workplace is presumably of benefit to everybody. Numerous studies affirm the power of positive feelings and attitudes like enthusiasm and friendliness to energise and motivate individuals and groups (Walter and Bruch, 2008; Barsade and Gibson, 2007; Branch and Murray, 2008; Ingram and Zou, 2008; Schoenewolf, 1990).

2.5 Foucault and Biopower

An important set of discourses and practices taken up within staff development programmes are those related to staff health and wellbeing. The number of sick days lost due to depression, anxiety and stress increased by 24% in the UK from 2009 to 2013 (Davies, 2014). Many studies of health and wellbeing programmes at work suggest that they can reduce health care costs, absenteeism and improve the quality of work life and morale (Michaels and Greene, 2013; Langley *et al.*, 1988; Noblet and LaMontagne, 2006), however questions have been asked about the political, economic and ideological drivers behind health programmes in the workplace (Cederström, 2011; Kelly *et al.*, 2007; Zoller, 2003). The concept of ‘biopower,’ (French

biopouvoir) as introduced by Foucault, describes the techniques of modern nation states of regulating subjects by controlling bodies in diverse ways (Foucault, 1978), and thereby controlling populations. For Foucault, 'power is everywhere: not that it engulfs everything, but that it comes from everywhere' (Foucault, 1978, p121-122). Biopower is intimately bound up with economic power, knowledge production, and truth or '*alèthurgie*', a term constructed by Foucault to describe rituals and forms in which truth is expressed as part of the technique of government, or truth manifestations serving legitimising authorities (1978, p20). Health and wellbeing initiatives, as promoted by governments and corporations, can be seen from this perspective as instruments (or technologies) of power managing large groups of people. In his later work, Foucault (1988, 1989) identifies 4 major technologies with a matrix of practical reason; technologies of production, technologies of sign systems, technologies of power and technologies of the self, all being instruments of biopower. Larsen (2007) dissects Foucault's concept of biopower, and concludes that biopower is intimately bound up with political and economic liberalism. The task of biopolitics, Larsen argues, is to nurture and optimise the life of the population, however the critical dimension of the political economy keeps a close check on the financial viability of health initiatives, and in this sense health is political (Larsen, 2007). Other authors use Foucault's concept of biopower to put wellbeing initiatives at work under a more critical spotlight. Zoller (2003), for example, suggests that work health programmes (WHPs) ultimately try to engender managerialist values (e.g., resilience, authenticity), with the aim of creating more productive workers (which also implies that those who fail to achieve these goals could be seen as being less worthy or of less value). Pro-health ideas get internalised, and become part of the language of the institution and the staff within them. Idealised versions of working people emerge, such as the 'corporate athlete' (Kelly *et al.*, 2007) who embody both their own desires and goals, and those of the organisation (p3).

2.5.1 Technologies of the self

In the late 1970's Foucault's interest in forms of neoliberal governance veered

towards the more recondite ‘technologies’ or ‘techniques’ of self (Foucault, 1988, 1989). Self-care techniques are those that ‘permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves’ (1989, p18). Self-care, according to Foucault, implies knowledge, but is also the knowledge of a certain rules of conduct or of principles, which are at the same time truths and regulations. While targeted at individual domination, they are closely linked with external technologies of domination (p19). In his thesis on self-care, Foucault traces the development of the hermeneutics of the self back to ancient Greece and Roman (Foucault, 1989), yet the concept of self-care also lends itself to neo-liberalism’s aim of producing free and autonomous individuals concerned with cultivating themselves through various self oriented practises (Hamann and John, 2009). In a market driven system, self-care is inevitably framed as an investment and viewed from the perspective of the generation of income (Dilts, 2011). A vast health literature has grown out the ‘therapy culture’ (Furedi, 2004) and these idealised versions of selfhood, with companies making large profits from selling literature and programmes based on currently popular theories some of which have dubious research evidence in support of them (Storey, 2016). In the US alone, the self-improvement industry, including soft skills training provided through motivational speaking and coaching, generates \$10 billion per year (Marketdata Enterprises, 2013).

Another discourse that widely promotes neoliberal self-care practices, and which also plays a role in performance management, is that of positive psychology. Building on the pioneering work of Marty Seligman (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman, 2007), positivist occupational psychology focuses on ways in which positively oriented human resources and psychological tools can be used to improve work performance and promote occupational health and wellbeing. Versions of this approach such as positive organisational behaviour (POB), which emphasise the ‘strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to thrive’ (Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008, p148), have been marketed as sound investments in employees,

yielding direct economic benefits to the company (Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008). Appreciative Inquiry is another such approach, grounded in social construction and action research (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005) which, by using affirmative questions and focusing on what works, is viewed as a way of creating positive change for individuals and groups within institutions (Bushe, 2011). These types of models are incorporated into personal and professional development programmes, and encourage a less problem-focused approach to personal development and stress management.

Positivity, at first glance, offers a seductive discourse (Fineman, 2006), a vision of ‘the sunnier side of life’ (p270), with all the potential to be used for the good of the individual, institution and wider society. However, ‘popularist gurus’ and writers on positivity can be criticised for the bold and largely unreferenced statements they make to sell their products, or for commodifying soft skills development using particular versions of emotions such as happiness (Fineman, 2006; Happiness Ltd, 2016). Positivity and competency discourses can also be critiqued for ignoring the issues of political and economic power and privileges, thereby supporting a neo-liberal economic and political discourse (McDonald and O’Callaghan, 2008). In her critique of positive psychology, ‘Smile or Die’ Ehrenreich (2010) argues how positive affect is used as a means of socio-economic control; for instance, serious situations such as redundancy are presented to staff as growth opportunities, thus disempowering staff from, for example, taking industrial action. UK universities have not been exempt from this positivist trend, or its critics. Writing on the state of happiness (or unhappiness) in today’s UK universities, Watson (2009) considers the moral right of academics to be unhappy, or at least to opt out of any officially prescribed version of happiness (pp17-22), while Ecclestone and Hayes (2008) lament what they see as the ‘dangerous rise of therapeutic education.’

2.6 Performance management

In organisational settings, the term ‘performance’ is largely associated with

management goals and measurable outputs (Morgan *et al.*, 2005; Gould-Williams, 2003). In this section I turn to an important facet of modern organisational staff development, performance management, focusing on three approaches incorporated into LDPs: 360-degree feedback, coaching and leadership skills. Armstrong (2006) defines performance management as a systematic process for improving organisational performance by developing the performance of individuals and teams via agreement, measurement, feedback, positive reinforcement and dialogue (pp493-496). The overall aim of performance management is for individuals to assume responsibility for not only improving personal skills, but also aligning them to organisational objectives and ensuring that individuals uphold corporate values (Armstrong, 2006, p494). Employee development and performance management are fundamentally linked, with the latter aimed at reaching and exceeding targets, delivery of high quality customer service, and growth in profits through maximising human capital advantage (Armstrong and Baron, 2005; Armstrong, 2006). While a positive relationship between employee training and performance management and empowerment and efficacy have been found in various studies (Men, 2011; Haines and St-Onge, 2012), managers and employees are often sceptical about the value of performance management and may see it as a waste of time and resources (Aguinis *et al.*, 2011). Hence new and existing initiatives have emerged, aimed at enhancing performance management in staff and allowing them to show what they can achieve in terms of organisational performance.

2.6.1 The 360-degree review

As a means of obtaining feedback from a wide range of line managers and co-workers, the 360-degree feedback process first gained huge popularity in the corporate world (Ghorpade, 2000), and its subsequent use in a range of organisations has been widely studied (Atwater and Waldman, 1998; Morgan *et al.*, 2005; Maylett, 2009). When used as a performance management tool it is designed to enable employees to receive feedback concerning their leadership skills and abilities at a given time, from line managers and colleagues (Solansky, 2010). Self reported assessments are considered

to be easier to obtain than multi-perspective reviews, but are prone to bias and self inflation (Donaldson and Grant-Vallone, 2002; Schwarz, 1999). The 360-degree appraisal is considered a superior tool, as it can capture not only the individuals' perspective on their own skills but that of coworkers. The assumption is that self perception accuracy can be developed by ascertaining the degree of agreement between self and others' evaluations, and can provide the individual and their line managers with valuable feedback (Solansky, 2010).

2.6.2 Coaching

Coaching can be described as partnering of coaches and clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximise their personal and professional potential (ICF, 2015). Studies pertaining to coaching in the workplace suggest that as interpersonal interventions they provide a bridge between promoting the goals of performance management, career development and wider self-care culture (Ladegard, 2011; Parker *et al.*, 2008). Once largely associated with sports and other forms of practical training, in today's world coaching has many different forms and expressions, each of which serve different people and purposes (Bennett, 2010; Feldman, 2005; Hackman and Wageman, 2005; Jones, 2009; Williams *et al.*, 2010). As a work intervention, coaching has a growing appeal, and has been associated with improving performance, transferring knowledge, higher job satisfaction and retention of employees (Kahle-Piasecki, 2011; Parker *et al.*, 2008). There is also a growing body of academic literature exploring the nature and potential benefits of coaching in HE (Passmore, 2006; Hackman and Wageman, 2005). Studies suggest that coaching and similar interventions help people to enhance sense making (Toit, 2007), rein in emotional impulses, handle relationships and conflict more smoothly and reduce workplace stress (Ladegard, 2011). While the focus of the exchange is on the coachee, the relationship can benefit both parties in terms of job performance and career development (Liu *et al.*, 2009).

Many of the commonly used coaching models emerged out of management and organisational development (Aguinis *et al.*, 2011; Theeboom *et al.*, 2014), and emphasise neoliberal goals such as improved productivity and organisational performance targets (Whitworth *et al.*, 1998). Unlike counselling and psychotherapy, which are past-focused, coaching models usually focus on future goals, such as through use of the GROW model (MindTools, 2015). Another difference is that coaching is seen as being for highly functioning people as opposed to those with some disorder and dysfunction (Maxwell, 2009; Bono *et al.*, 2009; Feldman, 2005). In real life however, the division between therapy and coaching can become blurred, with different coaches assuming a style which is may be more closely aligned with goal setting or psychotherapy (Ives, 2008; Rogers, 2004; Maxwell, 2009). In various studies, coaching has been specifically used to treat for mental health (Bora *et al.*, 2010; Williams *et al.*, 2010) and is increasingly aligned with psychotherapeutic models such as cognitive behavioural therapy (Seligman, 2007). In terms of facilitating good interpersonal relations and promoting wellbeing, by offering peer support (Parker *et al.*, 2008; Showers and Joyce, 1996; Whitworth *et al.*, 1998), coaching plays a potentially useful role in mitigating against modern ills such as job stress (Ladegard, 2011; Gyllensten, 2005) and work related anxiety (Gyllensten, 2005). On the other hand, the dysfunctional and hierarchical aspects of coaching and mentoring are understudied (Scandura, 1998; Berglas, 2002); for instance there are power implications to both interventions and their availability within organisations (Maxwell, 2009; Berglas, 2002). The fact that coaching is seen as particularly suited to senior management and executive levels (Feldman, 2005; Thach and Heinselman, 1999; Bono *et al.*, 2009; Wasylyshyn, 2004), indicates clearly ranked aspects to what might be called the ‘neoliberal coaching culture.’ Definitions of executive coaching also ascribe an intellectual and moral superiority to the individuals requiring this level of intervention; for example, Karol Wasylyshyn (2004) describes executive coaching as a company-sponsored perk for top high potential employees, and a customised development process intended to accelerate an executive's business results and effectiveness.

2.6.3 *Leadership and Performance management*

As HEIs compete in the global market, the need to support and train both service and academic staff in the necessary skills sets, information and values required for leadership and management roles has become more exigent (Floyd, 2015). Training up effective leaders and managers is seen as pivotal in creating an environment in which employees are emotionally and physically engaged in their university jobs (Knight, 2012). Modern models of leadership in organisations are generally less strongly normative and transactional than traditional hierarchical models that emphasised ‘leaders and followers,’ and often promote alternative developmental goals, such as towards producing leaders who are inclusive (Kugelmass, 2006; Ryan, 2007), transformative (Caldwell *et al.*, 2012) and even spiritually minded (Fry, 2003; Avolio and Gardner, 2005). The concept of authentic leadership for example, features prominently in recent leadership and management literature (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Clapp-Smith *et al.*, 2008; Klenke, 2007; Avolio *et al.*, 2009; Wang and Hsieh, 2013). At the heart of authentic leadership theory is the idea that self-awareness, self-regulation and being a positive role model are key to building healthy relationships with those whom one is managing or leading (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). In addition, authentic leaders, it is argued, promote the development of authenticity in followers, benefiting their wellbeing and the attainment of sustainable and genuine performance (Avolio *et al.*, 2009). Senior employees are seen to play a leading role in performance management, both in terms of improving their own performance within and beyond the organisation and orchestrating the personal and professional development of employees with whom they work in a managing, mediating or supportive role (Kelloway *et al.*, 2013; Clapp-Smith *et al.*, 2008). From a socio-political perspective, discourses presenting leadership models as vehicles for organisational change via LDPs need to be carefully examined. The privileging of leadership skills can be viewed as hierarchical and divisive (Gillies, 2012), and as espousing ‘designer leadership’ models (Gronn, 2003). At the same time they fail to address the prevailing

myth of exceptionality and shirk the potential redundancy of the leadership concept in the face of the alternative, more democratic, distributions of power (Gronn, 2003).

2.6.4 Performance management in HE

Within HE performance is now considered to be of considerable importance both within sector and as a public issue, with recent national and international university league tables making newspaper headlines (McCormack and McCance, 2006). There is a general view that ‘good’ management practices equate to better performance in organisations (Haines and St-Onge, 2012; McCormack *et al.*, 2014; Armstrong and Baron, 2005), including universities (University of Westminster, 2015b; McCormack *et al.*, 2014; Casu and Thanassoulis, 2006). However, persuading faculty academics to engage with performance management has been described as ‘like herding cats’ (McCormack *et al.*, 2014). McCormack *et al.*’s study (2014) of over a hundred universities found wide variations concerning the efficacy of performance management practices, with better management practices at departmental level being most closely associated with superior overall performance scores. The reluctance of academics to engage in top down performance management practices may be due in part to their already high intrinsic motivation concerning their work (McCormack *et al.*, 2014; Clarke and Knights, 2015; Berg *et al.*, 2015), meaning less reliance on external incentives than some other work sectors (McCormack *et al.*, 2014). Teaching and research may be experienced as an occupational ‘calling’ (Berg *et al.*, 2010), thus high levels of emotional capital may be invested in these elements of their university life and work. Yet, grass roots studies of contemporary universities affirm that the culture of managerialism has fully infiltrated university and faculty life (Floyd and Dimmock, 2011), which may change the vocational nature of the academic world. In response to internal competition and new forms of management control, via performance incentives, league tables, targets and surveillance procedures (Clarke and Knights, 2015) academics have, willingly or not, become heavily preoccupied with their careers and identities.

2.7 Interpersonal relationships

I have, until now, considered soft skills and competency building principally as individual activities. However, the LDPs examined in this study are above all social events, encompassing relationship building, trust and various forms of group rituals around experiential learning. Characteristically they take place in real time and between real people in a shared physical space, offering staff opportunities for human contact, social interaction and participation in social rituals. Interpersonal encounters, and the feelings and behaviours that arise from them, can be studied from a wide range of perspectives. In this section, I draw on different literatures on group dynamics, beginning with the concept of belonging and its association with personal wellbeing.

2.7.1 Belonging and wellbeing

What is it that we seek from togetherness? Theorists have grappled with this question for millennia. As humans we are essentially group animals, thus feeling left out of the group is psychologically painful for most of us. A need to belong is so great that, under most circumstances, people will form social attachments quite readily (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). On the other hand, where people have a choice they are likely to congregate with others who they know or align themselves with. Sense of belonging refers to the experience of personal involvement such that the person feels themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment (Hagerty *et al.*, 1992). The preponderance of work concerning sense of belonging and social isolation within the psychological (Hagerty *et al.*, 1992; Hagerty *et al.*, 1996) and educational literature (Kember, Ho, and Hong, 2010; Reay, Crozier, and Clayton, 2010; Sawir *et al.*, 2007), including in studies of teachers and corporate staff (Canrinus *et al.*, 2011; Jaitli and Hua, 2013), suggests that both sense of belonging and what is known as psychological sense of community (Burroughs and Eby, 1998) are connected for emotional wellbeing, and can be promoted through holistic staff development.

2.7.2 Friendships in the workplace

While interpersonal friendships in the workplace have always existed, more recently they have become a significant area of study (Dickie, 2009; Markiewicz *et al.*, 2000; Sias and Cahill, 1998; Hall, 2009; Rawlins, 1992). Workplace friendships can span gender, age and culture (Pakeeza *et al.*, 2011), serve different individual and organisational functions, and are an important part of institutional participation and career building. As Rawlins (1992) points out, ‘friends help in finding jobs and opportunities for promotions, provide support and third party influence on important decisions, and convey warnings about policy changes and ‘rumblings upstairs’ (pp165-166). Studies suggest that the positive benefits of certain types of workplace friendships to individuals and the organisation override the negative effects such as disputes (Sias and Cahill, 1998), while same gender work relationships can increase morale and resilience (Andrew and Montague, 1998). However with increasing work pressures and intensified work regimes, modern employee interpersonal work can suffer (Parris *et al.*, 2008), which may limit social contact and chat in the workplace. The important role friendships play in mediating the stresses of work demands- whilst at the same time being impeded by these demands- is an issue requiring more consideration within organisations. In the formation of relationships at work and underlying any interaction among colleagues and strangers within organisations, and for creating a nurturing environment in which people can thrive and be creative, trust is of paramount importance (Lewicki and Bunker, 1996; Meyerson *et al.*, 1996). Without trust, relationships will always be partial and guarded, and generally it needs to be established in stages (Jones and George, 1998). Activities designed to encourage people to get to know and build trust between one another, such as icebreaking, role-play and other relationship building devices feature widely on LDPs, and are therefore investigated in this study.

2.7.3 Embodiment and emotion

The concept of ‘embodied experience’ emerged from the field of somatic psychology and sociology (Giddens, 1991; Reeve *et al.*, 2010) and has been chiefly applied in

healthcare settings (Ray, 2006; Niedenthal, 2007; Lester and Tritter, 2005; Harris, 2008); but has been considered in other contexts such as fieldwork (Spry, 2001; Okely, 2007) and ‘authentic’ leadership (Ladkin and Taylor, 2010). An allied concept, embodied engagement, refers to the participation of the entire self in an activity, including in understanding and meaning making (Ray, 2006; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Among the theories of embodied engagement in education, critical performative pedagogy considers the body itself as a place of learning and experience (Pineau, 2002). Performative pedagogical practices acknowledge bodies as whole experiential beings in motion, both inscribed and inscribing subjectivities (Perry and Medina, 2011). Developing an appreciation of the link between embodied engagement, performance and group learning seems essential for understanding the nature of face-to-face LDPs and processes and outcomes of various activities within them. This way of delivering staff learning and development can be viewed as resource intensive, nevertheless the emotional bonding engendered by shared rituals during embodied encounters, including body work (eating, touching and other forms of non-verbal communication) and casual conversation, may be stronger, more meaningful and more enduring than other types of modes of communication in the workplace (Nardi and Whittaker, 2002; Collins, 2004).

Studies suggest that working in groups may act as a means of developing shared emotional competences or group emotional competences (GECs) (Koman *et al.*, 2012) otherwise unachievable at an individual level. According to Koman (2012), group norms developed in the workplace can, in theory, have a ‘cascading’ effect on workplace and classroom behaviour, with potentially positive outcomes. Why particular groups or teams are more or less successful in competency and relationship building is a complex and much investigated area, and has to do with individual personalities (Glew, 2009; Davies and Kanaki, 2006), shared abilities and emotional competencies of the group (Koman *et al.*, 2012). Other factors include leadership effectiveness (Cavallo and Brienza, 2006; Morgeson *et al.*, 2010) and leadership styles (Niven *et al.*, 2012), transient personal and shared moods, the sharing of group

values, symbols and goals and the absence of on-going emotional tensions through to the mood (George, 2000, 1995). Classic theories on group dynamics and organisational change, such as presented by Lewin and others (Lewin, 1947; Burnes, 2004), often portray the management of change as a matter for expert facilitation (Badham *et al.*, 2012, p189). Field theory for instance, has been seen as an highly important in explaining the various factors within a situation or organisation which act as 'driving forces' or 'restraining forces' working for or against desired changes within organisations (Lewin *et al.*, 1951). Lewin's model can be criticised for being top-down, for ignoring organisational power and politics, and for over-emphasising rationality (Burnes, 2004; Badam *et al.*, 2012). Many dramaturgical approaches on the other hand, stress the interweaving of intellect and emotion within the narrative framing of events, and their expected and desired outcomes (Badam *et al.*, 2012).

2.8 Group Rituals

Social science has a long preoccupation with what people do when they are in one another's presence (Hausmann, Jonasan and Summers-Eflar, 2011), including the performing of social phenomena known as rituals. Rituals can be defined as routinised behaviours that are performed repeatedly according to either an implicit or prescribed schedule (Palutzian, 2017). The extent to which one considers social interactions to be 'rituals' depends on how these phenomena are viewed, however traditionally rituals have been regarded as 'special' events or acts, often with religious or spiritual connotations (Palutzian, 2017, p25). While religion has long been associated with both ritual and feeling, Emile Durkheim was one of the first to write about the emotional importance of ritual for group solidarity:

‘Everything changes when a [ceremony] takes place . . . Once the individuals are gathered together a sort of electricity is generated from their closeness and quickly launches them into an extraordinary height of exaltation . . . Probably because a collective emotion cannot be expressed collectively without some order that permits harmony and unison of movement, [their] gestures and cries

tend to fall into rhythm and regularity, and from there into songs and dances . . .’ (Durkheim [1912] 1995, pp 216-18).

Goffman challenged the special status of social ritual by ascribing equivalent attributes to mundane interactions of the everyday as Durkheim attributed to formal religious rituals. Instead, he focused on the unspoken norms and everyday ritual acts situated and played out within social situations, such as meeting and greeting one another (Goffman, 1959, 1967), the vast repertoire of which includes all the exchanges establishing how people interplay (Collins, 2004, p18). Randal Collins (2004), also a proponent of the school of ‘subcognitive ritualism’ (Collins, 2004, p11) goes further; he finds rituals acted out everywhere, including in the most intimate and socially marginalised social situations, such as cigarette smoking and drug taking.

2.8.1 Rites of passage and liminality

Ethnography seeks to study people not as isolated individuals but collectively, using fieldwork to explore a particular social group and its culture in detail and at length. Here, I focus on the work of anthropologists Victor and Edith Turner, to consider the concepts of the rite of passage, liminality and communitas. Victor Turner (1920-1983) is remembered as one of the most creative minds in the field, and one of the first to direct scholarly attention towards embodiment and embodied engagement (Turner, 1969). Through analysing Ndembu ritual, Turner (1969) showed how ritual passages served as moments of creativity enlivening societal make-up, and argued against Durkheim that rituals were far more than just reflections of social order (Thomassen 2009). Building on Van Gennep’s early tripartite models of rites of passage (1909), Turner defined rites of passage as transitions, which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age condition. According to Turner, rites of passage are marked by three phases: separation, margin (limen- signifying threshold) and aggregation (Turner, 1969). The first phase of separation comprises symbolic behaviour, signifying the detachment of the individual from an earlier fixed point and social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (state) or both. During the

intervening liminal phase the characteristics of the ritual subject, or passenger, are ambiguous. This is a threshold state during which the person is 'betwixt and between' two cultural states. Liminality can be likened in different cultures to death, to darkness, to the wilderness, 'to an eclipse of the sun or moon' (Turner, 1969, p359). We are presented in such rites with a moment in and out of time, and in and out of secular social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition of a social bond (p360). The liminal individual has no status, rank or kinship position; 'nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows' (1977, p98). In the third phase of aggregation or incorporation the incumbent takes on a new social position, attached to which are both rights and obligations binding on this social position.

Turner considered both the concept of rite of passage and liminality to be universally applicable to different cultures, including contemporary societies. Later however, he suggested that in modern consumerist societies liminal experiences have been largely replaced by 'liminoid' moments, where creativity and uncertainty unfold in art and leisure activities (Turner, 1974, Thomassen, 2009). Thomassen (2009) argues that Turner's insights, while important, should not be blindly accepted, and that his presentation of liminality primarily in relation to art and leisure sidelines some of the 'dangerous' and 'problematic' aspects of liminality (p15). Thomassen goes on to distinguish between different types of liminality, as applied to individuals, groups and societies, and with a temporal and special dimension (p16). Taken in its widest sense of 'betwixt and between', liminality can be applied in many contexts, but in doing so liminality must lose its essential meaning as threshold state. Szakolczai considers modernity itself as 'permanent liminality' (2000), where any of the phases of separation, liminality, and aggregation can become 'frozen', like a film stopped at a particular frame (Szakolczai, 2000, p20).

2.8.2 Communitas

Turner proposes two juxtaposed and alternating models of human interrelatedness. The first is society (social world) as a structured and differentiated hierarchical system

with many types of evaluation separating actors in terms of more or less. The second, which emerges in the liminal period, is a state of 'communitas' or social communion in which individuals equally submit together under the general authority of the 'ritual elders' (e.g. managers, organisers). Referring to this process, Turner explains his preference for the Latin term 'communitas' over community, as it can distinguish the model of social relationship from an area of living (Turner, 1969, p370).

Like the terms rites of passage and liminality, the concept of communitas emerged during or from fieldwork within societies with structures very different from contemporary western society. As archetypal human experiences however, rites of passage and liminality are also features of modern westernised social worlds, including LDPs. Back in the 1960's, Victor Turner noted how in western society values of 'communitas' were, for instance, strikingly present in the literature on the hippy generation and their 'opting out.' Communitas, as a 'betwixt and between state' represents a type of 'anti-structure,' in that it exists outside of the prevailing social structure. In his later work, Turner distinguished between 'marginality' and 'liminality' explaining that, while both are betwixt and between, 'marginals have no cultural assurance of a final stable resolution of their ambiguity' (Turner, 1974, p233).

Communitas, more even than liminality, lies in the realm of feeling as opposed to structure. As Edith Turner explains (2012), communitas often appears unexpectedly, as it is felt by a group of people when their life takes on full (or one might say authentic) meaning. It is the group's pleasure in sharing common experience. It occurs due to the readiness of people, in their search for common human collective sentiment, 'to see their fellows as they are' (p2). These are moments of change freed from the regular structures and restrictions of everyday life. The question I ask in relation to this study is, how far is communitas possible in the conventional workplace, given that this concept has largely been explored in terms of the 'naked and unaccommodated human being', the 'free soul' who can unreservedly link with others? (Turner, 2012, p1)

2.8.3 Collective energy

The effects of collective feeling have been variously explained. Durkheim (1912), a pioneer in the study of group ritual, coined the term ‘collective effervescence’ to denote the arousing of mutually shared emotions (von Scheve, 2011) in particular with regard to the genesis of values and symbols shared during group rituals (p1). Sociologist Randall Collins also portrays interaction rituals as emotionally laden phenomena (Collins, 1993, 2004). Drawing on Durkheim’s theory he portrays all individuals as strategic pursuers of ‘emotional energy,’ who constantly feel their way through situations (2004, p3), and seek moral cohesion within the group. Ultimately, Collins argues, it is this emotional energy that individuals seek from interaction rituals (p44), which people take away with them and which therefore determines the ‘success’ or ‘failure’ of a ritual. He proposes that success and failure of any particular group rests on the ability of the group members and their rituals to generate sufficient emotional energy (EE) to maintain member solidarity, and that EE is the common denominator of all rational action. Although EE can be both positive and negative in quality (Boyns and Luery, 2015), Collins argues that, at a micro level, positive emotional processes are easier to enact than conflict processes (the latter being easier to conduct at a distance (Collins, 2004, p74) and are therefore a stronger feature of face-to-face human interaction rituals than discord.

According to Collins (2004), the key to successful rituals is where human nervous systems become attuned and bodily patterns become enmeshed in a process he calls ‘emotional entrainment’ (p64). von Scheve et al (2014) describe emotional entrainment as affective attunement which emotionally ‘charges’ group rituals and influences group-related attitudes beyond the original encounter. Entrainment is believed to be reinforced physiologically by different mechanisms (Levitan and Hirschberg, 2015), including by relatively fast alternation of turn taking, shared gestures or facial expressions and ‘stimulating’ activities (Allen, 2013), all of which help prevent boredom or stagnation. Where emotional entrainment is sufficiently

strong in social situations, members not only identify with the group, but also wish to repeat the process (Allen, 2013), thus reinforcing what Collins terms ‘interaction ritual chains’ (Collins, 2004). Suggestive though it is, Collins’s theory of emotional entrainment has rarely been tested empirically, although von Scheve et al (2014) found that, in study of attendees of football stadia, emotional entrainment reinforced group identification and aided the emotional charging of group symbols. Other researchers have proposed similar effects. George (1990), for instance studied what he called the ‘group affective tone,’ whereby the mood or ‘affective tone’ between individual group members is so consistent that it becomes a group property and affects the outcomes of group work (George, 1990; George and Bettenhausen, 1990).

Although stemming from different disciplinary perspectives, theories concerning collective feeling and behaviours share things in common. Rejecting a purely structural functionalist view of society, they suggest alternative ways of interpreting the formation of social groups, which are less tangible but can explain the human need for congregation and connectivity more profoundly than positivist theories can achieve. I suggest that what the concepts of collective effervescence, *communitas* and emotional energy all attempt to linguistically define is a sense of otherness that ensues when people temporarily lose the separateness that egocentrism creates. At such moments, something greater than the sum of its parts occurs, a wholeness that is created through sharing collective feeling. As Durkheim and the Turners both recognised, through collective effervescence and *communitas*, actors can be taken away from or beyond the profane and the self-seeking, into the realm of the sacred. While practising rituals together helps to bind participants together, this is not to suggest that ritual and emotional energy always generate what Edith Turner calls ‘collective joy’ (2012). There are darker and more manipulative sides to rituals, for example, ritual behaviour can foster an in-group, out-group mentality (Paloutzian, 2017), while strong emotional energy can be manifested as jealousy, rage, distrust and revenge (Boyns and Luery, 2015). In addition, there are other forces in conventional society, which counter the status-leveling effect of *communitas*. In the following

section, I discuss the self-conscious side of human social behaviour, as explained by Goffman through his theory of impression management.

2.8.4 Performance and authenticity

Researchers in the field of social interaction suggest that the ‘performed to an audience’ (Turner, 1987) aspect of ritual renders them more meaningful, challenging and memorable for those taking part. For Goffman, the modern actor is a self-conscious, face saving, individual, who even in familiar social settings, is compelled to ‘put on a face’ during his or her performances to and with others. When ritual proprieties are broken or misunderstood moral uneasiness and feelings of embarrassment result. Using dramaturgical metaphors, Ervin Goffman (1959, 1963) describes the ways in which performers knowingly ‘give’ and unwittingly ‘give off’ impressions, but constantly seek to monitor them, in order to maintain face, whether this is at an informal social gathering or in a work place setting. The need to make a favourable impression is so great that, according to Goffman’s thesis (1959), actors make constant efforts to deceive others, while also seeing through the deceptive practices of the other. Even when occurring among people they know well in ‘backstage’ areas, an actor’s performance is not necessarily more authentic, although actors may ‘knowingly contradict’ themselves, and others (1959, p114). Actors are either taken in by their own act, are aware of performing non-authentically, or they are somewhere in between authenticity and masquerade (Goffman, 1959, p11). While it could be argued that Goffman was writing at a time (1950’s and 1960’s) when the rules of social etiquette were more rigid, his thesis on impression management was intended to be universally applicable. Thus, according to the modern workplace etiquette, acting in a way that *appears as if* one is being true to one’s self (or ‘authentic’ in its contemporary sense) is more likely to make a good impression than, for example, acting in an unforthcoming manner. At the same time our society is saturated with such high levels of inauthenticity (such as ‘friendly,’ bogus emails) that it is impossible to know whom to truly trust (Vannini and Williams, 2009), calling into question what authenticity even means in post-modern society.

2.8.5 Collective feeling versus egocentrism

Having examined the different theories on ritual, how can the concepts of *communitas*, emotional energy and impression management be reconciled? And what can they suggest about the paradoxical nature of LDPs? I consider these and other questions concerning the social world of LDPs in the light of my findings in my discussion chapter (section 6.2). For the time being, I make the following assertion: that by focusing on the individual and using self-consciousness as a tool to encourage competitive consumerism, the neoliberal version of capitalism evident all around us, (including in workplace) militates against collective feeling and action. In place of collectivism, a ‘what’s in it for me’ philosophy now prevails, which is likely to include people’s attitudes to personal and professional development. At the same time, people emotionally seek out the ‘golden glow’ (*communitas*, emotional energy, sense of higher purpose) which spontaneously arises out of successful interaction rituals, and which remains in their memory. Designers and managers of LDPs are conscious of this desire, and as I suggest in my discussion, employ trust building and emotionally suggestive devices to encourage individuals to allow themselves to become sufficiently open to collective feeling, and the possibility of individual transformation, via interaction rituals.

In addition to their functions as embodied and social bonding rituals, LDPs also promote learning and skills development. In the following section, I turn to the literature on group effect and change to examine LDPs in the light of experiential and transformative learning theory.

2.9 Experiential Learning

The types of LDPs examined in this study are those in which learning is often designed to take place in an informal way, largely through face-to-face group work or teamwork, and with the use of experiential learning tools and methods, which I consider in this section. The terms learning and training are sometimes used

interchangeably but are different modes of knowledge acquisition. Marsick and Watkins (1990) define learning as the way in which individuals or groups acquire, interpret, reorganise, change and assimilate a related cluster of information, skills and feelings, but also how people construct meaning in their personal and shared organisational lives. Training, on the other hand, usually refers to short-term activities, which emphasise practical skills immediately applicable to job (p4). Learning can take place in many situations, formal, informal and incidental (Marsick and Watkins, 1990, p6). It is best identified through changes in behaviour but may also represent alterations in internal perspectives, which are often difficult to quantify (p4). Although learning and development increasingly takes place on one's own and/or via digital communication networks, face-to-face interpersonal scenarios often provide the catalyst for deeper forms of personal and professional education.

There is an increasing recognition that formal knowledge and technical skills play but a small part in enabling the modern employee to effectively confront the ambiguities of practice (Statz, 2007), and that other types of experience based abilities are required, which are best acquired through more experiential approaches to learning. Experienced-based learning (EBL) (Boud *et al.*, 2006), and problem based learning (PBL) (Schmidt *et al.*, 2011; Wood, 2003) as types of learning techniques and tools, have been the subject of extensive research, theory building and practical work for decades. The idea that particular types of experience-based learning, when employed contemplatively (Dewey, 2008; Schon, 1983; Kolb and Kolb, 2005), are particularly effective in changing the 'hearts and minds' of learners has given rise to numerous theories and theoretical models, for example on reflective practice, which have been extensively applied in education and interpersonal work settings (Schon, 1983; Moon, 2004). In this section I look at three areas of experiential learning which I consider of relevance to the types of staff LDPs explored in this study: role-play, incidental learning and transformative learning.

2.9.1 Role-play

As experiential learning techniques, role-play and simulations have gained increasing popularity and recognition for the training of students and professionals in personal and interpersonal competences (Lane and Rollnick, 2007; Smith, 2009; van Soeren *et al.*, 2011; Hromek and Roffey, 2009). Theatrical devices, such as imagination games and role-play, have long been used in education (Hromek and Roffey, 2009; O'Sullivan, 2003) and anecdotally at least are a highly engaging way of learning (Telesco, 2006). These dramatic methods are grounded in different theories and ideologies, some of which will appeal to, or be more relevant to, different audiences. One such method- socio drama- has been described as a provocative and engaging method that employs different theatrical techniques, acting out emotionally charged scenarios in a facilitated environment to promote learning through action (Moreno, 1943) on issues or topics of social importance (Telesco, 2006). Typically, real-life situational scenes are developed by students based on actual incidents, setting the 'stage' for audience participants to identify and interact with the characters and to facilitate personal growth, raise consciousness, and initiate behavioural change. Role-playing of patient-practitioner relationships by trainee medical practitioners for instance, has been shown to be beneficial in terms of increasing student knowledge and skills with patients (Issenberg *et al.*, 2005; Smith, 2009; Lane and Rollnick, 2007; Mitchison and Khanna, 2010).

Despite their popularity within education, there is still limited empirical evidence on the learning and teaching processes embedded in simulation activities, their ability to substantially change behaviours and inter-professional attitudes in the longer-term (Kenaszchuk *et al.*, 2011), and their emotional impact on players (Fixsen *et al.*, 2015). Theatre mimics human social life, while correspondingly social behaviour includes numerous elements present in theatre and dramatic texts (scenes, characters, roles, dialogues, conflicts, etc.). While some dramatic techniques are closer to pure theatre, many simulation games or activities, whether actual or virtual, feature imaginary scenarios that mix genuine reactions with 'in character' role-play, which for those

who are new to these kind of learning devices can be confusing (Fixsen *et al.*, 2015). Issues such as impression management (Goffman, 1959) can arise when people are asked to perform in front of others, which in some cases can cause anticipatory anxiety (Chaturvedi and Chandra, 2010), embarrassment and other uncomfortable emotions. Even professional actors processing deep emotions for imaginative performances were found to need some recovery time (Blix, 2007). In addition to this recovery period, novices may also require debriefing with supervisors or peers (Fixsen *et al.*, 2015).

2.9.2 Incidental learning and transformative learning

Informal and incidental learning refer to learning outside formal structured, institutionally sponsored, classroom-based activities and often take place under non-routine conditions. The central premise of experienced-based learning is that learning and workplaces have more to do with authentic, personal and lifelong aspects of people's lives than a de-contextualised training regimen, and during informal activities people share good practice but also become aware of taken for granted assumptions. Incidental learning is defined as a by-product of other activities such as task accomplishment, interpersonal interaction or trial and error experimentation (Marsick and Watkins, 1990, 2001). Incidental learning takes place outside the classroom, often in groups, for instance, as result of a conversation with a colleague, occurring in between learning activities at a conference, on porch steps and in people's rooms (McFerrin, 1999). Much of this learning may go unrecorded, because it is so informal and therefore difficult to evaluate. From an interaction perspective, incidental learning that takes place out of earshot of 'experts' and facilitators falls under the category of 'back stage chat' (Goffman, 1959; Collins, 2004), as opposed to front of stage interactions. 'Group discussion' may in reality be hard to separate from other types of information exchange such as gossiping (Michelson *et al.*, 2010; Kurland and Pelled, 2000; Waddington and Fletcher, 2005), which also fulfills important social functions, such as gaining information about individuals, cementing social bonds, and engaging in indirect aggression (Baumeister and Leary, 1995).

Seen as a form of transformative education (TE), transformative learning is held to be a uniquely adult form of reasoning and acting, which can be practiced in many contexts, including new career training, programmes for humanitarian service, rehabilitation, and spiritual renewal (McWhinney and Markos, 2003). Transformative learning has been widely embraced as a means of teaching for change through intentional action (Fisher-Yoshida *et al.*, 2009), with many different versions of this theory now posited (Dirkx *et al.*, 2006; Boyd and Myers, 1988; Kitchenham, 2008; Taylor, 2008). The emergence of this concept owes much to radical educator and activist, Paulo Freire (1921-1997), and his theory of ‘critical consciousness’ (1973) and conception of education as a means of empowerment and justice (McCloskey, 2014), within 1960’s Brazil (McCloskey, 2014). However, as a pedagogical construct it is most closely associated with the work of Mezirow (1991) in adult education settings. Mezirow describes transformative learning as the processes or particular ways through which adult learners learn deeply and effectively and in such a way that their taken-for-granted frames of reference (perspectives, habits of mind and mind sets) are transmuted into more discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change and reflective modes of thinking and behaviour. A fully functioning adult ‘frame of reference’ is one that is more inclusive, differentiating, permeable, critically reflective, and integrative of experience (Mezirow, 1996). What Mezirow refers to as ‘meaning’ perspectives or schemes, function as perceptual filters that determine how an individual will organise and interpret the meaning of their life experiences (Mezirow, 1991, 1996, 2002). These perspectives naturally change and evolve in response to life experiences, especially crises such as job loss or retirement (Taylor, 2008), which induce powerful emotional responses in the individual. Meaning schemes can also transform accumulatively over a period of time, usually aided by experiential learning and teaching methods, like group discussion, role-play and methods which promote self examination and creativity (Mcgonigal, 2005). This type of learning also needs to consider the various psychological and cultural demands of modern life on learners

(Kegan, 1994), and support growth, development, and transformation and (co)-creation in adult learners through the provision of a robust holding environment.

Critics suggest that transformative learning theory and practice has largely turned away from its emancipatory roots, is less concerned with social justice and remedying inequalities, and is now more of a technology of self (Foucault, 1988) with wide applications as a neoliberal governance tool (Ball, 2015). For Freire, individual transformation occurred through praxis, in an on-going cycle of collective action and reflection (Fisher-Yoshida *et al.*, 2009), whereas nowadays, Bowers (2005) argues, people are compelled to engage in transformative learning due to the growing dominance of a market mentality. This form of 'transformative education' is neither emancipatory nor progressive, but has become instead the 'Trojan horse of western civilisation' (Bowers, 2005), passing on the types of practices and beliefs that deepen social and economics divides, when it is the neoliberal system in which individuals and groups operate which is in real need of transformation (Levin and Greenwood, 2013).

2.10. Summary

This chapter represents an overview of the literature of relevance to this study, including the socio-political forces shaping the present direction of human resource management in HE. The topic of staff learning and development is very broad, and part of the process of 'feeling my way' through the literature included choosing which areas were of most relevance to my aims, objectives and data set. Its position as a work-based project also helped to shape the kinds of literatures of most relevance to my understanding of phenomena within professional and organisational contexts, and in particular that of staff learning and development. My particular interest lies in the ways in which organisations adapt to and make use of wider cultural changes within society, which in the case of staff learning and development has a great deal to do with the marketing of soft skills and emotion-based competences as a prerequisite for individual and organisational success. There were many topics related to continuing

education, professional competencies and reflective practice, which were examined but not included in this study. The final content represents my personal exploration of the textual information and the written artefacts, through which, I believed, my subject area could be understood or at least interpreted.

I began with a review the literature on soft skills and competencies and their association with emotion and emotional intelligence and gradually developed this section in the light of my findings on soft skills. I have previously studied sociological and psychological theories on group effect in relation to student learning and development, and assumed this study in relation to staff learning. I found it increasingly difficult to ignore the entrepreneurial messages on LDPs and subsequent to my main work in the field, I turned to critical discourses on new capitalism and neoliberalism. This led me to study the writings of Foucault on biopower and technologies of the self. I went on to consider performance in two different but interrelated contexts: performance as associated with entrepreneurial and managerial goals, and performing within group learning situations as viewed from a social interaction perspective. The sections on liminality and *communitas* were completed at the end of my study and reflect my growing interest in exploring LDPs as personal and collective rites of passage. In the next chapter, I present a full account of my methodology.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter is divided into five sections. In section 3.1, I discuss my ontological position and the reasons behind my choice of methodology. I then go on to explain the use of ethnography and autoethnography in this project. In section 3.2, I consider my chosen conceptual framework, which can be broadly described as that of symbolic interactionism, but which has also been informed by other dramaturgical and performative approaches, several of which emerged from the Chicago School. In section 3.3, I reflect on my use autoethnography in relation to the politics of insider research. In Section 3.4, I turn to ethical considerations and in section 3.5, I explain the various steps of my study design including data collection and analysis.

3.1 Rationale for methodology

In my introduction I asked what it is that leads us to choose a particular path of direction. I explained that, from early in my studies, I have felt more ‘attuned’ to the holistic, as distinct from the reductionist, approach to knowledge and phenomena. I have applied this approach in my professional work as both health practitioner and educator. Holism has multiple meanings, dependent on the discipline and context within which is being discussed (Flood, 1999; Bell and Morse 2005). The general tenet of holism, however, is that the properties of phenomena render them more than just the sum of their parts (Smuts, 1936). In contrast to holism, reductionism generates knowledge and understanding of phenomena by breaking them down into constituent parts, and studying these simple elements in terms of cause and effect and the forces which act on them to establish laws and principles (Patel 1987). As a philosophy and practice, holism may be simple to describe, yet its connotations are profound. Broadly, I describe my ontological position (or world view) and my approach to practice as holistic and I set about this study in that frame of mind.

A range of different approaches has been used for professional doctorate studies, all of which have epistemological associations (Costley and Armsby, 2007). Research in

the social sciences can be divided into two distinct epistemological approaches, positivist and interpretive, and my study fits squarely into the latter category. Positivist approaches consider that phenomena can be studied objectively, whereas in interpretive approaches, the subjective interpretations of both researcher and participants are seen as an integral part of the research and its findings (Whitehead, 2004). Interpretivism is not analogous to holism; nevertheless, they inhabit a common territory, in that both view humans, with their thoughts, views, emotions and behaviour, as complex and dynamic. Interpretive approaches vary widely in their methodologies, some relying more on description and others on symbolism to interpret their findings. On considering the complexity and the highly subjective nature of my area of study- staff experiences of LDPs- I felt that a qualitative, interpretative approach would be most likely to bring out 'thick' data, which would allow for different viewpoints and insights into the area under study. Attempting to separate myself completely from my data was unrealistic given that my study took place within my own place of work. I therefore made a decision to use autoethnography for my fieldwork and symbolism and metaphor to aid in the interpretation of my findings and conclusions. In the following section, I discuss my use of ethnography.

3.1.1 Ethnography

Ethnography is a holistic approach to research, which was first developed by anthropologists in order to understand people within their social and cultural contexts, but has since been widely used in sociology and other disciplines to explore different types of behaviour (Maguire, 2015). Essentially ethnography seeks to make sense of social settings and social behaviours from inside, by privileging the perspectives of those involved in this situation (Pole and Morrison, 2003, p xiii). Ethnography has been used quite extensively in organisational and educational settings (Alexander, 1999; Cohen *et al.*, 2000; Pole and Morrison, 2003), both in and outside the classroom (Cellini, 2009). There has been also been a growing interest in, and increase in the number of, ethnographies carried out in organisational settings as part of professional

doctorate (Davis, 1999; Walsh, 2009). By conducting extensive fieldwork in social settings, the ethnographic approach enables researchers to witness and experience first-hand, and in an embodied way (Okely, 2007), the dynamic, communicative elements uniquely constituting social phenomena within particular cultures (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011; Moustakas, 1990) and through so doing, record and later report on multiple perspectives. In the field of education, ethnographic studies can also contribute to a greater understanding of the process, formulation, evaluation and critique, including understanding recent shifts and changes in HE (Iloh and Tierney, 2013). In addition, ethnographic work can be used to provide a better understanding of organisational processes, with the researcher themselves acting as a thinking contributor to organisational change and transformation (Flood, 1999, p183).

In traditional approaches to ethnography, facts and evidence are gathered through detached observations of the culture, with the researcher observing in the background (Dharamsi, 2011). Yet, in an attempt to respond to pressures of scientific detachment ethnographers can find themselves ethically and personally compromised. As Amit (2000) asserts, it is simply not possible for the ethnographer to separate themselves from their field, and rather than attempting to assume such an objective observer position I elected to use, and define this work as, autoethnography.

3.1.2 Autoethnography

Placing this work into a specific ethnographic category has needed consideration, as contemporary ethnography incorporates a wide span of approaches (Wall, 2006). Autoethnography is a qualitative research method which fully acknowledges and utilises the insider/outsider juxtaposition, by exploring the personal experiences of the researcher through social, cultural or political contexts (Kelley, 2014). In so doing it ‘challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act.’ (Ellis *et al.*, 2011, p1). Whether one chooses to call one’s work *autoethnography* or *ethnography* ‘depends as much on the claims made by authors as anything else’ (Ellington and Ellis, p449).

More an art form (Duncan, 2004) than a science, autoethnography combines characteristics of autobiography and ethnography (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2010; Eastman and Maguire 2016).

I have described this work as an autoethnography in that I have sought to describe and systematically analyse (graphy), my personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno) (Ellis, 2004, 2011). There are many variations to the autoethnographic method (Wall, 2006). A number of other researchers have used autoethnography within HE settings (Doloriert and Sambrook, 2011, 2012; Humphreys, 2005). Having previously published a very personal autoethnographic study (Fixsen, 2015) I am familiar with this method and with sharing my personally nuanced findings with a critical community of peers. In autoethnography, the focus of one's critical interpretive enquiry is meaningful biographical experience (Denzin, 2014); in other words it is 'self' interwoven with the world that surrounds the 'self.' It could be said that research is merely an extension of a researcher's life (Ngunjiri *et al.*, 2010), and, instead of hiding from the matter of bias and personal feelings, interpretive autoethnography acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality and the researcher's influence on research.

As is usual in autoethnography, my concern has been less with the issues of establishing 'hard facts' than with capturing immediate, lived experiences, both of the people I have included in this study, and my own. Metaphor- described as a form of comparative, usually linguistic imagery (Anderson *et al.*, 2014) - is a technique that can convey meanings that literal language fails to do. In this study I have chosen and sometimes created metaphors to interpret my own world and that of others, and the symbols which define and give meaning that those worlds. As a research method autoethnography has been critiqued for its introspection, self-indulgence and lack of scientific or social perspective (Holt, 2003; Wall, 2006), and for relying too heavily on the emotional response of the reader, rather than offering objective analysis and methodical rigour (Duncan, 2004; Wall, 2008). I would argue that emotions are an

integral part of human experience, just as passion is a motivating force driving the commitment required in research (Polanyi, 1966).

Highly interpretive as they are, autobiographical and biographical texts challenge conventional research methodologies by ignoring the rigid definitions of what constitutes meaningful and useful research, but adding to the richness and depth of the research area (Chang, 2008). My autoethnographic approach is broad and includes in-depth interviews, participant observation, and personal journal writing. As such it breaks with the self-other dichotomy (Ellis *et al.*, 2011) of more self focused accounts to become a collaborative cultural discourse. Like any autoethnography, my work may make for uncomfortable reading, as through it I have re-examined not only my professional life but social inequalities and power relations (Ngunjiri *et al.*, 2010) surrounding it. Professional doctoral research is more than just the acquisition of professional knowledge, skills and competencies, it also concerns the ‘negotiation of ourselves’ (Eastman and Maguire, 2016) and with the culture surrounding and shaping our agency, and autoethnography provided me with a means of exploring and elucidating this complex interplay.

Although not commonly employed in organisational research, autoethnography can present the researcher with an interesting lens through which to better understand culture (Chang, 2008). As a grassroots ethnographic approach, this autoethnography shares features with institutional ethnography (IE), as developed by Dorothy E Smith. IE explores social relations that structure people's everyday lives, specifically by looking at the ways that people interact with one another in the context of an institution with the aim of understanding how those interactions are institutionalised. Like EI, this study has no prior interpretive commitment, it begins with the actualities of the lives of those involved in the organisation, their real issues and concerns and their relationships within the institutional order (Smith 2005, p31). Griffith and Smith (2004) followed this approach in their study of schools from their perspectives as single mothers. Smith's perspective is however feminist and Marxist, and while my

epistemological stance can be described as ‘left of field,’ my interpretations assume a more humanistic and symbolic approach. I begin with concerns however, about the effects of the rapidly changing HE landscape and culture on academics such as myself, and with the effects of neoliberal policies on both HE and society in general, which I aim to explore through this work. As a strategy, my approach also bears similarities with the extended case method (Burawoy et al., 2000) in that both are holistic, context sensitive, and experiential and use mixed methodology. However I suggest that there are differences between the case study and my methodology, in that as I see it, a case study phenomenologically investigates a specific case within a ‘system’ (Smith 2005, p37), whereas my (auto) ethnography sets out to explore behaviours, values, beliefs and practices of participants including myself within a given cultural setting through extensive fieldwork. The conceptual framework I used to interpret data, as described below, has more in common with the ethnographic tradition of social anthropology and the sociology of symbolic interaction, than the branch of social science associated with case study.

3. 2. Conceptual framework: symbolism and ritual

The conceptual framework I use to explore and interpret my findings is inspired by sociological and anthropological traditions, which employ metaphor and symbolism to interpret social and cultural rituals and the meanings that participants or actors ascribe to them. In particular I have drawn on the writings of Durkheim (1912), Victor Turner (1969, 1985) and Edith Turner (2012) on ritual symbolism, Goffman (1959, 1963, 1967) on ritual and performance, Anselm Strauss (1978, 1982) on social worlds and Collins (1993, 2004) on interactional ritual chains and emotional energy. While each of the above authorities made their mark through developing and espousing different theories concerning symbols and rituals within society, all have been associated with the tradition known as the Chicago School to a greater or lesser degree. As an entity, Chicago School has gained almost mythical status, however in his reminiscences of the School (2017) sociologist Howard Becker dispels any misapprehensions concerning homogeneity of thinking and allegiances among staff or

students, instead describing it as a school of activity concerned with the training of sociologists and the maintaining of its reputation.

3.2.1 Chicago School

One strand of thought widely associated with the Chicago School, and which informed my thinking for both this and two previous studies (Fixsen, 2013, 2015), is that of symbolic interactionism. The term symbolic interaction was coined by student and professor at the University of Chicago, Herbert Blumer (1900-1987), who acknowledged the contribution of George Herbert Mead and others to his understanding of this approach (Aksan *et al.*, 2009). According to Blumer (1969), people act toward things on the basis of the meanings they ascribe to those things.

Blumer saw three ideas as critical for symbolic interactionism; focus on interaction between actor and social world; a view of both actor and world as dynamic; and actor's ability to interpret the social world (Moore, 2012). Thus society is best viewed as the result of repeated interactions among individuals, involving language and symbols, rather than as a structural entity, which can be studied by itself (Carter and Fuller, 2015). Central to symbolic interactionism is the concept of language and significant symbols in human communication and interaction (2015, p1). As a theoretical perspective with potential to generate new insights, symbolic interactionism has a strong intellectual history, including a long tradition in education (Gallant, 2013; Moore, 2012; Simsek, 1997).

While sociological studies also employ ethnography, traditionally this methodology has been associated with the intensive and extensive fieldwork of anthropologists (Moore, 2000). There are, however, many overlaps between the two disciplines, including in the use of symbolism and metaphor to interpret society and culture. I therefore perceive no contention in looking to authorities within both schools, and drawing on their insights to interpret and explain my findings. In section 2.8.2 of my literature review I discussed the work of Victor and Edith Turner on *communitas*, comparing *communitas* with other dynamic social theories (such as Durkheim's

concept of ‘collective effervescence’ (1912) and Collin’s idea of ‘emotional energy’ (2004). This is not to dismiss the singularity of these approaches, but to illustrate that my findings on LDPs may well lend themselves to a number of theoretical interpretations. In choosing an ethnographic methodology for this study, it was in the hope and expectation that what I discovered could be of meaning and value, to both myself and to the organisation. Over the course of my investigations, my ‘lens on the world’ naturally seemed to alter. I searched for a more general metaphorical and conceptual frame to explain my own perceptions and observations of LDPs. Despite extensive thought and discussions on this subject however, a suitable framework eluded me. The answer came to me at an ESA conference, after a presentation featuring the work of Paul Cressey introduced me to social world theory (Cressey, 2008; Strauss, 1978, 1982). In the following section, I examine the origins of this theory and its potential applicability to LDPs.

3.2.2 Social world theory

Social scientists use the term ‘social worlds’ to describe a whole array of different formations and systems. Social worlds can be depicted as ‘universes of discourse’ (Vasconcelos, 2007), as power structures (Eljaer and Huysman, 2008), as communication networks (Castells, 2009), and so on. In general however, sociological perspectives of social worlds can be said to share certain common assumptions: that there are predictable social relations in the world; that social situations will recur in certain patterns; and that social situations follow courses that can be understood (Ballantine and Roberts, 2009). The origins of social world/social arena theory can be traced based to Mead (Stryker, 2008), Cressey (Cressey, 2008) (whose study of 1930’s Chicago urban nightlife depicts the taxi hall as a distinct social arena), Shibutani (Shibutani, 1955), and others. This approach was, however, most extensively developed by Anselm Strauss (Strauss, 1978, 1982), who believed it could be applied to both small and large social worlds and areas, to understand the complexity of human social organisations (Clarke, 1991). Each complex social world characteristically has subdivisions or sub-worlds, which constantly shift, reorganise

and realign (Clarke, 1991, p133). An important feature of the social world approach is that social worlds are seen as highly fluid areas (p133), which allows the researcher to override constraints of micro/macro dichotomous studies (Strauss, 1978, p121). Rather than looking at organisational mechanisms for recruitment, Strauss urges the social world researcher to focus on how people encounter, are introduced to, drawn into or get 'hooked' in social worlds, as these can explain ease of movement, level of commitment, marginality and authenticity. As an approach, social world theory has been applied in different organisational contexts (Clarke, 1991; Strauss, 1978; Eljaer and Huysman, 2008; Vasconcelos, 2007), although no studies were found that used it in an HE setting. In terms of its flexibility and versatility, social world theory has been compared to theories of communities of practice (Eljaer and Huysman, 2008; Wenger, 1998) and to grounded theory (Vasconcelos, 2007), and is arguably not discipline or sector specific. Clarke (1991) argues that, as a relativist and interpretive approach its scope is relatively unlimited. A consideration of social world/arena theory helps the researcher to 'get a handle on collective action' (p129), and to study the actions and interactions of collective actors in different situations. She goes on to describe how the social world theorist should walk around and around their social world, 'staring relentlessly,' until its commitments, ideologies, work organisation and so on can be understood and specified (Clarke, p136).

3.2.3 Dramaturgy and performance theories

Social worlds are, above all, dynamic arenas, in which actors are required to take on roles and to participate in various performances, either as performers or spectators. To understand and interpret the nature of social performance in relation to staff learning and development, I have studied and drawn upon dramaturgical theory, including the work of Goffman (1959, 1967), Turner (1985), Collins (1990, 2004), Ng and Kidder (2010), Bergman Blix (2007) and others. Dramaturgy has long been used to interpret performances within micro social settings (Stryker, 2008; Mead, 1976; Badam *et al.*, 2012). At times I adopt the term 'interaction rituals' (Goffman, 1967) to describe face-to-face encounters acted out according to social, cultural and moral rules.

Goffman, a master in the use of metaphor, uses the term ‘face’ not just in its physiological sense, but also as a social and emotional construct (Jacobsen and Kristiansen, 2015, p71). A performance often presents an idealised view of the situation, as we attempt to appear a little better than we are. As actors in rituals, individuals put on performances to make an impression and assert that they are who they profess or pretend to be (2015, p72). Such everyday interactions are performed in various types of dramaturgical settings or ‘regions,’ which may be referred to theatrically as the front region (‘front of stage’), the back region (‘back of stage’) and so on (Jacobsen and Kristiansen, 2015).

Emotion, as I have indicated in my review of the literature, can be conceptualised in different ways. Like Goffman, I take the view that emotions are central components of social performances, which are constantly being ‘enacted and portrayed’ in different social contexts (Goffman, 1959, p75). Although dealing with the incorporeal, Durkheim’s theory of collective effervescence (Durkheim, 1912) and Collins’s depiction of ‘emotional energy’ (EE), are interesting and dynamic concepts that I have used in other studies to explore different group experiences (Fixsen *et al.*, 2015). According to Collins, individuals can be seen as pursuers of EE who are continually feeling their way through situations (2004, p3) and seeking moral cohesion within the group. It is this emotional energy that acts like a ‘glue’ between members (Collins, 1990), and determines the ‘success’ or ‘failure’ of a ritual. The qualities of EE are hard to define and to capture; nevertheless I have set out to do so in this ethnography, in relation to face-to-face learning and development events.

3.3 Autoethnography and ‘insiderness’

Ethnographies have been traditionally associated with fieldwork a single setting, where the subject of research is formerly unknown to the researcher, the researcher is a new face for the participants, and data collection is primarily acquired through participant observation and interviews (Goodson and Vassar, 2011). This status quo has changed however, as the melding of personal and professional roles in

ethnographic fieldwork is recognised as a ‘messy experience’ (Marcus and Fischer, 1986, p22), which in reality cannot be readily or usefully separated from other experiences and periods in researchers’ lives (Amit, 2000). More than any other method of research, in ethnography the intimacy and familiarity that the researcher forms with their subject are fundamental to the investigation rather than a by-product or hindrance to it (Amit, 2000). Be that as it may, as a member of staff for the organisation I had chosen to study, my position would be described as that of insider researcher. The term ‘insider research’ refers to the process whereby a member of an organisation undertakes an explicit research role in addition to the normal functional roles they hold in an organisation (Holian and Coghlan, 2013). Literature on insider doctoral research in HEIs is relatively sparse, thus those working in this way are not that well supported by traditional textbooks and research methodology (Mercer, 2007) in their attempts to navigate the ‘hidden ethical and methodological dilemmas of insiderness’ (Labaree, 2002, p. 109). At the same time, work-based learning awards are an attractive option for professional learners hoping to gain recognition of their professional competence while enhancing their own practices (Walsh, 2009).

A possible benefit of the insider approach is that it can allow the researcher to interpret familiar and unfamiliar events in fresh and insightful ways (Patton, 1990), which can be more rapidly translated into practice than ‘outsider’ research. A close examination of what goes on in one’s own institution can be personally enlightening and an effective means of interpreting and preparing for change (Bergquist, 1992). Then again, insider research has many challenges, such as investigating persons with whom one works and who are stakeholders in the University as well as other practical and ethical problems posed by the role duality (Holian and Coghlan, 2013). Another problem is prior knowledge, such that any investigations and conclusions I make are inevitably coloured by my own experiences and agency within the organisation, thereby potentially being too personal and idiosyncratic to be of much interest or help to others (Kezar and Eckel, 2002).

3.3.1 The politics of insider research

Managing organisational politics is another issue (Holian and Coghlan, 2013), and one which I discussed at length with my project supervisors. From an ethical viewpoint, the issue of confidentiality can be more complicated and delicate in the case of insider research (Tolich, 2004; Floyd and Arthur, 2012). Embedding oneself in the organisational culture can be a lengthy process and in my own case extended over eighteen months. The insider researcher does however, have the benefit of nuanced insights and in-depth involvement (Jarvis, 1999; Walsh, 2009), which I have tried to use sensitively but also to full advantage. Social interactions lie at the heart of most organisations, including my own and, with its emphasis on the social domain, the ethnographic method seemed an apposite choice for this study. Some may argue that academic ethnography and work-based research follow different traditions with contrasting approaches (Walsh, 2009); however by working heuristically I aimed to integrate these two approaches, to gain new insights into my own organisation, and thereby positively contribute to the academic profession in which I work.

3.4. Ethical and safety considerations of research

Ethics can be defined as the science of morals or rules of behaviour (The British Psychological Society, 2009). While designing and carrying their work, researchers should consider the ethical consequences of their own behaviour carefully (Connolly, 2003), which implies being sensitive to the lives and circumstances of the people from whom they wish to learn (Benzies and Allen, 2001). In the following section, I outline possible ethical issues and discuss the various measures I have taken to ensure that, as far as possible, my research causes no discomfort to participants and does not compromise either the participants or my own position in the University. All work has been conducted according to the University code of ethics (presently 2014/15) and was approved by the University research ethics subcommittee. Given that my topic concerns the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of staff, I have considered the ethical and relationship issues of my methods at some length. While all research has implications for those involved, conducting interpretive insider research within one's

own institution or organisation, where participants are colleagues and where the content of data may be personal, the ethical and moral implications are arguably more pronounced (Floyd and Arthur, 2012). Brydon-Miller (2008) argues that prior to entering a research setting the researcher should critically examine themselves as an individual researcher, consider their core values and ask ‘what’s it in for me?’ (Brydon-Miller, 2008). In my own circumstance, I have a long standing personal and professional interest in soft skills learning and development, which could influence the types of responses I wish to elicit from my participants.

Participants have complex reasons for partaking; they may expect some benefits (therapeutic or practical) but at the same time may feel exposed by personal disclosure (Collins *et al.*, 2005). I have endeavoured to be rigorously non-judgemental and sensitive to what discussions around emotional and political issues might generate in others. Like Denzin (2005), I believe that our main obligation as researchers is always to the people we study, not to our project or to a larger discipline (p6). Participants in this study have offered up their vulnerability, and revealed their authenticity while removed from the protection of their usual work role (Sieben and Macmillan, 2010). I have used my experience and knowledge of counselling and other therapeutic skills to foster a good rapport with participants, to build trust and ease for all parties involved and to express my gratitude for all of their contributions (Costley *et al.*, 2010). Before attending or observing any PPD courses I made myself, and my research aims and methods, clearly known to managers and facilitators, and when possible personally introduced myself to participants. A potential dilemma of participant observation is the effect that my role as observer could have on the group (Robson, 2000). Again, I maintained an attitude of respect for participants and noted rather than manipulated events. I acknowledge in advance that my theoretical perspective will have bias; therefore honesty concerning research limitations is required.

An advantage of participant fieldwork is that one can capture ‘real life’ data directly (Robson, 2000, p191), however the researcher’s presence can also affect the way participants feel and act. To encourage facilitators and participants to feel more comfortable with my presence they were informed of my role in advance, so that any objections could be expressed. In the case of the leadership programmes, the organisers offered to inform participants of this study, and I observed only action learning activities. After introducing myself as a researcher to participants, I explained the nature of my research, and told participants they would be contacted about an interview after the course was completed. I tried to develop a good rapport with members of the group (Robson, 2000, p197), whilst acknowledging that this was dependent on the groups I was allocated to, plus any existing relationships with people in the cohort. Research involving people and their emotions can throw up significant ethical and political issues. Fostering rapport with participants and a sense of gratitude for their contributions (Costley *et al.*, 2010, p58) will hopefully increase the sense of trust and ease for all parties involved in the research. Because there is a great likelihood of colleagues being able to identify each other, I have to continuously consider not only confidentiality outside the organisation but also inside or internal confidentiality (Tolich, 2004). Colleagues are ‘connected persons’ (2004, p101), whether or not this connection is close or more remote. Findings from insider action research may include personally confidential or potentially embarrassing information related to members, stakeholders, organisation or researcher (Holian and Coghlan, 2013). These issues need to be considered when reporting or publishing or findings. To protect my subjects I have included only short quotations from interviews and have not stated the full work title or department of any participants, which may limit the ‘interest factor’ of the findings but in such a sensitive context feels entirely appropriate. In any journal papers I will seek to remove another details, which easily identify the institution.

3. 5. Methods, data collection and analysis

In this section, I discuss the rationale for my methods of data collection and sampling,

including participants and types of courses chosen. In keeping with the ethnographic approach I have engaged in extensive fieldwork for this project (Cohen *et al.*, 2000; Robson, 2000; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). As a senior lecturer and tutor at University, I regularly work and interact within and around ‘the field’ of my enquiry, however this is not analogous to ‘doing’ fieldwork, which I take to mean a type of inquiry characterised by personal involvement, commitment, and recording of data, aimed at gaining some understanding that can be shared with others (Wolcott, 2008). To ensure that I captured the culture for LDPs holistically and from multiple perspectives my work in the field has included participation on LDPs, in-depth interviews, and informal discussions with stakeholders, observations, examination of documents and other artefacts and extensive and personal journal writing. My data was gathered between May 2014 and October 2015, with methods (such as observation and interviews) often used concurrently. The semi-structured interviews with staff took place over a period of nine months. Following the ethnographic method, field notes concerning my personal experiences, observations and personal reflections were gathered together, written up and then preliminarily analysed after each encounter, and further questions raised by the data were noted (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

To ensure that the direction and methods of this study was acceptable, and that I was aware of current organisational staff development goals and strategies, I engaged in frequent discussions with different stakeholders involved in planning, managing and delivering different areas of soft skills within the University and beyond. This included informal talks and recorded interviews with staff members involved in the management and delivery of LDPs run through HR divisions, the Centre of Resilience and Westminster Business School. At various points I met with key staff managers working in the above to discuss how we could work together to ensure that any preliminary findings of the project could be utilised in the planning of future staff development programmes. One manager offered to provide me with details of upcoming courses, and circulated information on the project, including the participant information sheet, to participants and facilitators of various courses, or passed on lists

of emails to allow me to contact them directly. In view of the considerable interest expressed by some stakeholders in my project, and to capture a wider range of perspectives and experiences of soft skills activities, I invited some stakeholders leading and/or facilitating programmes for one-to-one in depth interviews. Data on numbers and categories of staff participating in particular staff development activities has also been offered by HR, which provided useful background to my study findings. I have discussed with some senior manager the potential of my work to critique some HR processes. While acknowledging possible tensions, the view was that the positive outcomes of an in depth study including increased understanding and piloting of new action learning designs would be valuable.

3.5.1 Programmes and activities examined

As a member of staff with access to the staff intranet, I was able to view the full list of learning and development and leadership and management programmes as soon as they were advertised. The range of learning and development programmes (LDPs) and activities available from May 2014-September 2015 was considerable, and in choosing which courses and cohorts to include in this study I was both opportunistic and strategic. Events included in this study lasted between a half-day and 12 days spread over 3 months and some participants attended more than one type of event. In all, eight LDP type workshops and courses were attended and/or observed. In addition I engaged in discussions with HRM stakeholders and consulted with a range of workplace data, documents and training resources.

As my interest was in face-to-face soft skills development and relationship building, I focused on courses that featured a high degree of personal development and group interaction. Working within my own time and career limitations, I chose to participate in courses which were of personal and professional interest, were available to me, lay within the scope of my PPDR aims and objectives, and featured soft skills activities or themes (see diagram 1). I chose to join a gender specific personal and professional development programme because it seemed an excellent example of a learning

activity that emphasised soft skills and featured a high degree of interpersonal work. Attending a coaching and mentoring programme was both a research and a personal career choice, and proved to be an excellent arena for exploring management of emotion from a personal and sociological perspective. Due to the priority placed on soft skills training for managers and senior staff (the theory being that the need for EI and related competencies increases with level of responsibility) (Beatty, 2010), I was keen to interview some middle and senior management staff and used convenience sampling to recruit participants from three leadership programmes. It seemed important to include participant observation during a residential event in my data set, and for convenience purposes chose a three-day interdepartmental residential. Also included were one and half day workshops in effective communication, resilience and socio drama. Various faculty Away Day events and cross faculty staff development initiatives taking place at this time were included in my overall data set. Courses largely concerned with hard skill development, such as IT, Maths and software workshops, were excluded from the study. Professional courses, including Diploma and MA programmes managed through the University for external staff students were also not included. Other courses were excluded due to their timing or for reasons of pragmatism, such as having found sufficient numbers of interview participants from other courses.

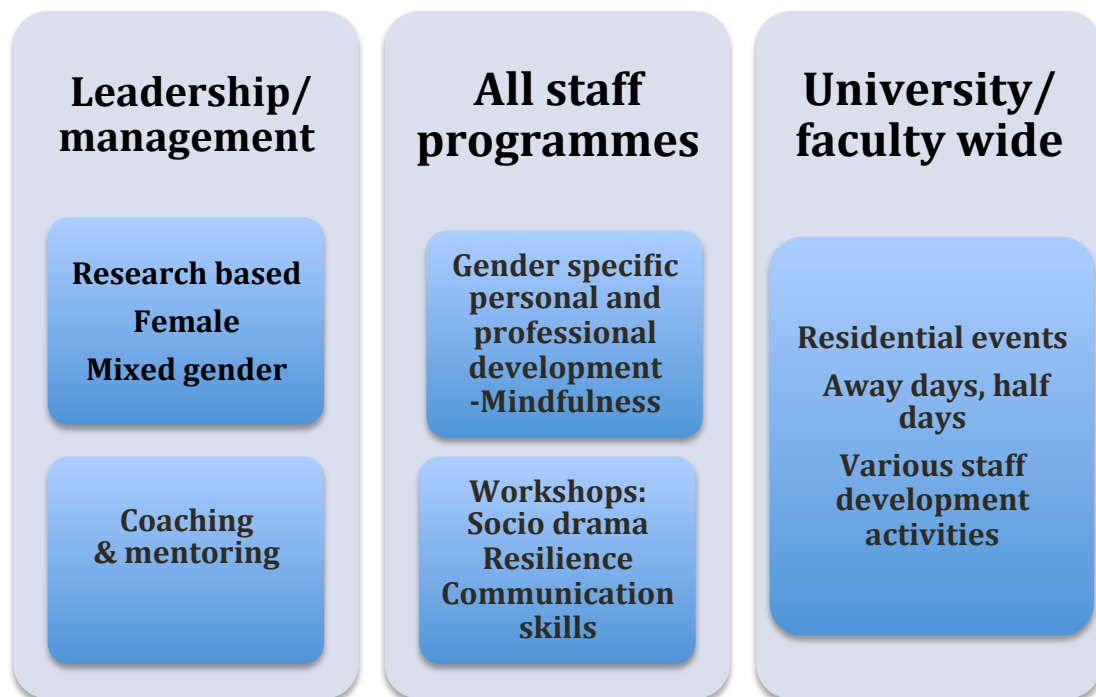


Diagram 1: Summary of LDPs attended and discussed in this project

Chapter 4 : Data collection

In their systematic study of a particular cultural group or phenomenon, ethnographers engage in extensive fieldwork, using multiple sources of data and data collection methods to increase the validity and trustworthiness of their findings (Riemer, 2008), including note taking, participant observation, interviewing, identifying themes and issues, and sorting and coding their data (Murchison, 2010). Nevertheless, the researcher brings their own cultural selves with them wherever they go (Murchison, 2010, p205) and attempts to objectify either choice of data collection or data method will be modified by personal preferences and choices, and the circumstances under which that data is collected. In this chapter, I explain how I went about collecting data for this study, and why I chose to proceed in the particular manner and order I describe. In section 4.1, I explain my use of autoethnography and then in section, 4.2 give examples of original notes from my field diary. In section 4.3 I explain how the recruitment process for interviews, and in section 4.4 examine the interview process itself. In section 4.5, I explain and illustrate my data analysis process through text and coding tables.

4.1 Using autoethnography

My original intention was to begin my fieldwork with participant observation, however my first request to observe a particular LDP met with some objections from the programme manager. As a result I decided against the participant observation method for events on which I had enrolled as a participant but instead kept detailed records of my personal experiences for autoethnographic analysis. Having recently completed another autoethnography for publication, I felt comfortable with this approach, and confident that it could provide valuable experience and data. On reflection, this was a sound decision, as it allowed me to fully involve myself in the programmes I attended, which in turn increased my sensitivity towards the social and political implications of LDPs.

Writing about the ways in which researchers do autoethnography, Ellis (2009) describes how the autoethnographer retrospectively and selectively writes about epiphanies made possible through being part of a culture or by possessing a particular cultural identity. During my fieldwork, I recorded the notes manually, dividing my field notes into personal, observational and conversational notes as best I could (Creswell, 2003, p64). That evening, or if necessary within the next few days, I fully narrated my feelings and perceptions about these events, storing my work in designated chronological files on my laptop for subsequent analysis. I was aware that this method of data gathering could be an impediment to full involvement in the experiences of the programmes and to some extent this was the case. To allow for participation in the programme timetable, I did most of my note taking in the periods between activities, or while a facilitator was taking the lead. When I felt it important to fully engage in an experiential activity, such as during a role-play exercise or in a highly interactive workshop, I waited until the evening or the following morning to write about my experiences and observations. In addition, I made extensive use of memos and the voice recognition software on my mobile phone, so that I could swiftly record my thoughts and feelings during or after an event. In this way, I was able to keep a detailed field diary of my autoethnographic reflections, to reflect on my own feelings as an individual and as a member of staff working within the university, note any changes taking place in my feelings and attitudes during the course of my fieldwork, and revisit emerging ideas and theories.

4.2 Examples of extracts from fieldwork diary

During my 18 months in the field I handwrote extensive field notes, the majority of which were later transcribed on to my computer. Some of these notes concern my personal experiences, thoughts and feelings, others are more descriptive or record the voices and conversations of various actors (such as managers, facilitators, participants, supervisors, family members) with whom I interacted or observed over the course of my work. In this section, I gave some examples of different types of field-notes, gathered at different points of my ethnography. The first example comes from my

time on a women's development programme, the second from a coaching programme. No real names were used in the field-notes, however I did distinguish between facilitator (F) and participant (P) comments.

Example one: Notes from women's development programme

Raw data from day

We talk about the positives of emotionality, which we later present to the class- it makes us more empathetic, we are seen as more open, people can see and maybe understand our feelings.

procrastination,

P- It's about talking it through- making changes- lots of learning from these exercises.

The next part is about fulfilling values and satisfying your self.

Conflict = unhappiness. Belief= inspiration

P- If your goals resonate with your values you will be more determined.

At this point I feel a bit distanced from all this this- how useful is this to me at this point in my life? Surely I know what my values are by now.

F- consider what qualities we value in others.

We are reminded that our core values don't really change, i.e. family, beliefs etc.

Well that's okay then

Notes made during day, and extended in evening:

We have to think what we would do if we won the lottery.

How we would spend our money.

But half of this has to go charity; it's not for us at all.

Everyone is very quiet- as if they are deep in their imaginations.

There is a definite sense of excitement at the idea that we have so much virtual money to spend. I find the first part of this exercise quite tricky. I won't give my money away lightly. I baulk at the idea that it might go into the pockets of charity administrators. Spending it on myself is very easy. I am a bit let down by my own materialism. Is this exercise about values or greed? When we share it becomes more fun. We all have problems selecting charities. We all wanted to see how our money was spent. We had some laughs about how to spend the money.

Example 2: Coaching session

Notes made during day, and extended in evening:

This week we meet in xx, which for me was more convenient. However there was something about being away from your usual work environment so it feels less like 'time out'. The room is very crowded and small, which makes it rather uncomfortable for a whole day.

We start with an exercise in pairs, looking at the most useful things be remembered from the first workshop.

P - has learnt how you could affect other people just by the way you look or behave, for instance looking disapproving.

F-there are levels of reflecting, and often different realisations and levels of understanding rise, come up three or four weeks after a discussion or event. It is about regulating yourself. We move on, but I would've liked to have talk more about this.

4.3 Recruitment for interviews

Recruitment of participants for interviews was a step-by-step process. Staff members who had recently attended one or more soft skills programmes (see Appendix 7, table 8 for summary of main ethnographic fieldwork) were contacted via email by an HR manager or myself, and were invited to participate in this research. Attached to the email was a copy of the participant information sheet (see appendix 1), which explained the purpose of the research in plain language, including the ethical procedures accompanying the interview process, and about use and storage of data. Before the interview all participants were sent a copy of the consent form (see appendix 2) to return before or on the day of the interview. In total, I conducted 25 semi-structured interviews between January and October 2015. Participants were selected on the basis of having recently attended one or more of the following learning and development programmes or workshops run by, or in association with

the university on the following topics; leadership, personal and professional development; coaching and mentoring, mindfulness, socio drama. To ensure that sufficient academic staff were recruited, participants from a recent cross faculty residential ‘development’ event were also included, as were programme organisers and facilitators from some of these events. To give the study a balanced perspective, the interview cohort also included programme organisers and facilitators. The final cohort was comprised of 7 female and one male staff from the corporate service sector, 8 female and 4 male staff working predominantly in the academic or research sector, and 2 female and 3 male programme managers/facilitators. Some participants had attended more than one course and discussed several events. Two participants who had attended two LDPs six months apart were separately interviewed about each of these events. Because of the volume and diversity of the courses on offer during this period, it was not practically possible to interview staff on every programme that included interactive soft skills learning, however the final interviewees constituted what I regarded at the time as a reasonably representative cross section of participants on these types of courses, covering different grade levels of academics and corporate services staff. The number of people volunteering to be interviewed across the range of targeted courses exceeded my expectations, although there were more female volunteers than males. The low ratio of male to female is, however, a reflection of the actual gender balance on many soft skills courses run for staff in or through the university, including on the mixed gender events I attended or observed, such as the coaching course and the mixed gender leadership programme. I was unable to attend or recruit participants from the personal and professional development programme for men, due to timing issues, however I did interview two participants who had formerly attended this course. A further study might throw more light onto the gender discrepancies on LDPs as a whole. The ratio of male to female facilitators on the programmes I attended was relatively even.

The following tables detail the programmes that were formally attended by myself and/or participants, and participants who were privately interviewed about their

experiences. These tables do not represent my full data set, which was far more extensive. During the course of my fieldwork I had many informal conversations with stakeholders in LDPs, and also studied many site documents. As a result of a cross-university change initiative (Learning Futures) that was being planned at this time, staff learning and development workshops were taking place on a particularly frequent basis. With the exception of one 3-day residential, these and many other staff development workshops and staff Away Days that were attended are not listed here, as in the early stages of data gathering and analysis they were considered separately. They were, however considered in the final triangulation of data for thematic analysis purposes. A chronological table of the main fieldwork activities can be seen in appendix 7.

Table 1: Courses and events attended by participants

Key to abbreviations: F= female, M = male; CS= Corporate service; AC =Academic

A. A gender specific personal and professional development course
B. A leadership programme for women
C. Mixed gender leadership programme (CS)
D. Mixed gender leadership programme (AC)
E. Coaching and mentoring course
F. Women researcher course
G. Leadership course for women
H. An Interdepartmental residential
I. A mindfulness programme
K. Interviews with programme managers and facilitators

Table 2: Summary of participants

Programmes discussed	Participant no.	Gender	Sector/ role (Corporate service/ academic/ researcher/ programme facilitator)
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A	1	F	Corporate service
A	2	F	Corporate service
A	3	F	Corporate service
A	4	F	Corporate service
A	5	F	Corporate service
B	6	M	Researcher
F	7	F	Academic/ Researcher
D/F	8	F	Academic/ Researcher
G	9	F	Academic
G	10	F	Academic
K	11	M	Facilitator
E/I/A	12	M	Academic
E/I/H	13	F	Academic
E	14	F	Academic
K	15	F	Facilitator
K	16	F	Corporate service
C	17	F	Corporate service
C	18	M	Corporate service
H	19	F	Academic
H	20	F	Academic
H	21	M	Academic
H	22	F	Academic
K	23	F	Facilitator
K	24	M	Facilitator
K	25	M	Facilitator

4.4 Interview process

In preparation for the interviews I purchased a Zoom Digital recorder for the purposes of recording my interviews. As this was a new recorder I tried it out at home to ensure that I knew how to use it. The sound quality was of sufficient quality to allow me to

digitally record straight onto the computer using the inbuilt dictation software on my MacBook air. While an invaluable tool for recording qualitative interviews, the impact of the audio recording process can also impact on the relationship, both in terms of the device itself and concerns such as ‘is this thing working?’ (Southall, 2009). One of my interviews failed to record the interview in full, and embarrassingly I had to request a repetition of the final part of the interview over the telephone. On the other hand, recording the interviews, rather than taking extensive hand written notes, allowed me to use a more natural interviewing approach (Gillham, 2005), and build personal rapport, while still managing the interview by setting agenda questions, and probing more deeply into areas of interest.

During the interview I used the humanistic interviewing principles (O’Hara, 1985) I have acquired through my therapeutic career, to acknowledge my own feelings as a researcher and colleague, and to build rapport and trust with my interviewee. Wolcott (2008) suggests that, in ethnographic interviewing, being attentive is only the first step; one should also be a ‘creative listener,’ that is someone able to take an interactive role, while talking less and listening more (p111). In order for key questions to be raised, including participants' reflections on one or more critical incident I kept in mind my topic guide, but encouraged participants to talk freely within and beyond these areas (Tripp, 1994; Watts *et al.*, 1997). I began by planning my interviews around what I saw as the key issues, creating a set of grand tour questions (Walcott, 2008), which were short and to the point. I continued to use this general question framework, but adapted and added additional questions as further issues came to light, to check for hunches as my theories developed over time (Charmaz, 1999) and to suit the particular area of experience (work background, course/s attended) of the interviewee. Each interview lasted around 40 minutes, with an additional 5-10-minute introduction and conclusion. The semi-structured question framework began along the following lines but was adapted to suit the participants’ area of experience.

4.4.1 Interview questions

Questions covered the following areas, but not necessarily in this sequence:

- Participant's area of work
- Reason/motivation to take part in the LDPs
- Overall experience of the course (including ethos, structure, facilitation, location etc.)
- Experience of group work and other activities
- Personal and professional gains from participating
- Anything particularly challenging
- Anything you would change
- Critical moments/impressions
- Plans or strategies for utilising skills a) in work environment b) in wider context

4.4.2 Transcribing of Interviews

After each interview, interviews were transcribed verbatim. 20 interviews were digitally transcribed in full by myself, and 5 by a professional transcriber, who has worked for other researchers within the university and who had signed a confidentiality agreement. Transcribing most of the interviews myself, although time consuming, allowed me to study the voice tone used by participants and by myself, and to consider the quality of my interview style and exchange of dialogue more deeply. All the interview transcripts were checked for accuracy and any identifying details removed. Participants were then sent an electronic copy of their interview transcript to check content, edit or approve its use (member checking). All data was then stored on one password-protected computer. An example transcript can be found in.

4.4.3. Ethical considerations of interviews

Researchers must take the steps necessary to ensure that all participants in the research understand the process in which they are to be engaged, including why their participation is important, how it will be used and how and to whom it will be reported (British Educational Research Association, 2011). Sensitivity is required when recruiting colleagues whom I may encounter in other situations (Costley *et al.*, 2010: p 49). I considered it important that potential participants felt under no pressure to take part and were fully informed of the purpose and framework of the research. I appreciated that participating in this particular research project required both time and personal commitment, and this was made clear to staff from the onset. I reassured those who agreed to participate that they were under no pressure to attend interviews even after they had consented to participate and that they were free to withdraw at any point without giving any reasons. One-to-one interviews were conducted in complete privacy in a room at the University, via Skype or telephone. Participants were assured that the interview was private, and that any data used from the interview would be anonymised and would form part of a larger data set. Individual interviews have the potential to have an impact on the participant, as they inevitably touch on subject matter beyond everyday discussion. There is a risk that disclosure may leave an interviewee with difficult or unresolved feelings, for both interviewer and interviewee (Beale *et al.*, 2004; Price, 2004). When interviewing participants I followed the approach of Carl Rogers (non-judgemental, authentic and congruent, giving the participant freedom to discuss unanticipated issues (Iberg *et al.*, 1959; O'Leary, 2006) and endeavoured to establish good rapport with participants before and during the interview. At the same time, I made a point not to delve into any areas that the person was uncomfortable about, and asked how they were feeling about the interview immediately after it had finished. I am trained to identify signs of emotional or physical discomfort and distress and to respond to this in an appropriate way; when I considered that a participant might potentially feel uncomfortable discussing a point, I reminded them that they did not have to proceed, or that I could turn off the recorder.

Qualitative researchers should consider their research not only as a tool for generating answers to abstract questions, but must recognise and be sensitive to their role in the construction of participant's meaning (Benzies and Allen, 2001). In the case of qualitative interviews this would include not wasting participants' time and being mindful of the way in which questions are posed during interviews and subsequently analysed. I was heedful of this, and kept strictly to the agreed interview format. I invited participants to contact me if they had any further questions concerning the research. The participant information sheet (sent to all participants prior to the interview) included contact details and the phone numbers of my supervisors to contact if they had any complaints about the interview process (see appendix 1). All participants were electronically sent copies of their interview transcripts to edit any parts they did not wish to be used in study.

The following points concerning confidentiality refer to data from interviews and observation field notes. At no point was confidential information shared with other members of staff, other than my doctoral supervisors. All identifying details were removed from the data before storing on my laptop and on NVivo. Electronic and audio data will be stored on a password-protected computer for a maximum of 3 years. No hard data copies of transcripts were made. All data use will be strictly within the terms of the Data Protection Act (DPA 1998). All disseminated information will be handled in a sensitive manner to protect the interests of staff involved, avoiding any negative publicity to an individual or organisation. Only short quotes (where the person cannot be identified) will be used in any paper, public presentations, or other publications about the project.

4.5 Data Analysis

Data collected during the course of an ethnography can be extensive, and the researcher must therefore code, count, tally and generally 'crunch' data into a useable form (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999). Meaning and significance must then be attached to the data set (1999, p5), and patterns identified. In the first stages of my

analysis, data from autoethnography, observation, interviews, stakeholder discussions and 'site documents' (such as course handbooks) were considered as separate elements, and read and re-read to discover variables (including categories and concepts) within them. This allowed me to later triangulate, or cross check the data and my analytical statements for consistency and accuracy (Riemer, 2008, p 208). After reviewing them in this way, I created a single NVivo file in which all data were stored, read, re-read and analysed holistically, and coded for patterns and themes. Throughout this process, I handwrote, or used note pad on my phone, to record theoretical memos as and when they became clear to me (Strauss and Corbin, 2015). While analysing my interview data, I used an inductive or 'bottom up' approach, to allow ideas, concepts and themes to emerge from the interviews. All interview transcripts were analysed line by line to ensure full immersion in the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Moustakas, 1990). Data was coded using a modified constant comparison approach (Strauss and Corbin, 2015) inspecting and comparing all data and fragments arising in a given case and moving from a larger to more compact data set (Silverman, 2014). As interviews were done over time, it was simple and logical to choose initial codes from early interviews, and to later modify and expand them as different information emerged (Silverman, 2005, 2014). The initial 8 interviews were coded manually (see example below) using the stage-by-stage process outlined in diagram 2 to establish initial codes and develop theory. A detailed code-log, which was used to develop both 'in vivo' (participants' own words or terms) and constructed (created by researcher) codes, to compare and cross-reference themes and codes from interview, observation and reflexive data. By repeatedly listening to the digital recordings and reading transcripts of interviews, I familiarised myself with all the data covering the full range of themes. In addition to manual memos and coding, all interviews were coded using NVivo software.

4.5.1 Example of rough coded interview transcript.

The following is a sample from my first rough coded manuscript. No hard copies were used, so colour coding was done through word, and extracts from all the manuscripts then cut and pasted under different codes and listed on different word documents.

Interview one

I think what I said- those were the main motivations really, something that would really help pin me down and focus, I think I was prevaricating, I was getting lost in the where do I want to be, what I want to do, being so busy at work it's hard to... and at home, you know home life is pretty busy and everything, so, from that point of view it helped me, it actually pinned me down, I went into it very much thinking I want to make this work from me I'm on it so I'll make it work me.

Interviewer- do you want to say a bit more about that?

P- Erm –Yeah I think I was just determined to make the most of the opportunity really to really use that time to use the period of the course, to home in on myself, to be selfish, alone just personally I needed that person time I think to put myself first, and it was a useful opportunity I think to get out of the office, and to look at the issues in my working life and say what you really want? To are you? Where do you want to be? And how you going to get there? I think it partly fulfilled that stuff at the time, and certainly just the time factor, just the time itself to reflect on those things was very useful.

Interviewer- just the time itself?

P-- Yes, to step out of the working world and be just who you are. There were lots of other benefits to the course, but I think that's where I set out as it were- on the course - did you want to talk about that?

Interviewer- yes. I think that was one of the questions that was coming up, but when you are talking about your own experiences what in particular did you gain from taking part, what stands out for you?

P- I think we're really out of touch with what is going on we don't really know what's happening in the rest of xx (the university)... yes you can get up and walk about but there's no one... it's not quite the same I sitting in office which is in the cut and thrust of things with a lot of people, we find it quite frustrating particularly when we have difficulties- technology difficulties, we have to wait ages to get any kind of communication. So, that's just a premise to say that I think going on course was a really lovely experience for me, to sort of share like minded things with other persons, to discover what they did at xx, it sounds crazy but I'd be x street most of the time I've worked here and it really is a very isolating experience. So I've never really felt much of a part of (the university) in that sense I suppose... I don't think I've ever expressed it like that (giggles). Its just curious isn't it. So that was a superb experience. We had a fantastic home group, home team, we got on right from the start. We shared very deeply about ourselves, different personal things and also but I dropped as well, and sharing definitely helped us bond. Because we cut through the superfluous quite quickly. Like, before we got to first.. coffee time.. We were there at the cut and trust of everything. So, that was a really, really great experience. I just bumped into one of them so I'm seeing her afterwards, so that's.. To build those friendships, that was very important, to get to understand a bit more about the roles that they do that make Westminster that run the organisation in the sense, that contribute to that, anyway, discover more cogs in the wheel I suppose. Er, sorry you said what did I get out of it?

Interviewer- No, no what you're telling me is really important. So, I had another another question which is quite central to what I'm looking out, which is about

what people get out of the peer group, you know what they get out of, working with others in those sort of situations.

P- Okay, great. Well, yes if I follow on from that I suppose to give you a whole view of that area I think something very valuable came from that from the relationships that were built with people, I think the honesty and sharing, first and foremost. I think that we took very seriously the idea that what was said among us stayed amongst this, so there was building that trust, that trust came quite quickly your home team which was really lovely there were people I thought I could trust, and I got the impression we all felt a little bit like that, perhaps not the girl who joined the second time, because she came the second workshop.

Coding key:

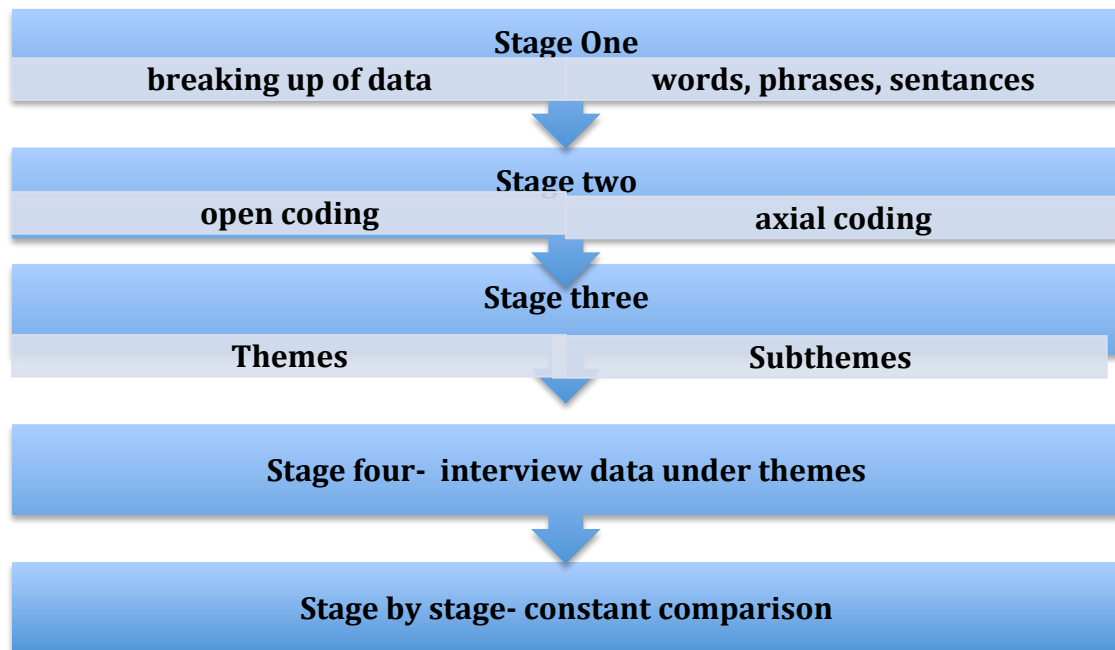
- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| • time out (from work) | • bonding/ sharing |
| • put myself first/ me time | • relationship building |
| • isolated/ out on a limb | • trust |

4.5.2 Coding process

At different stages of data analysis, emerging codes and themes were discussed with a supervisor, beginning with the initial manual codes (see table 3) and NVivo codes (see table 4). As concepts emerged or were discarded, further inductive coding (at open and axial levels) was performed and linked to existing theory in the literature, constantly referring back and forth between the data and evolving theory, to ensure the latter remained grounded in the experiences and narratives of my research participants (Strauss and Corbin, 2015). Here, open coding refers to breaking down, examining, comparing and conceptualising of data, and axial coding to the putting back together of data in new ways to make sense of categories (Strauss and Corbin, 2015). NVivo was also used for extensive query and text searches, to analyse different sections of the data in various ways and for safe storage of transcript data and other information relating to the project. As final codes emerged, data was repeatedly

scanned manually and with help of NVivo, to check for any missing or hidden codes or concepts.

Diagram 2: stages of data analysis



4.6 Reduction of codes and themes

The following tables describe the gradual reduction of a list of codes into final themes. In the first stage of data analysis a full list of manual codes was generated, studied carefully and placed under tentative thematic headings (see table 3). In order to encourage creative analytical thinking, various parts of the data set were considered in different ways. The initial 8 manually transcripts were also analysed in NVivo and generated codes, and divided under the headings of descriptive, conceptual and adjective data (see table 4). The full set out interviews was later analysed and initial themes and subthemes divided under conceptual/ perception level, relationship level and descriptive level (see table 5). Once the full data set had been gathered it was studied carefully and collated, and all codes were merged into reduced codes (see table 6) and final codes (see table 7).

Table 3: Manual coding/ themes

Motivations
cut off
out on a limb
out of touch
fortuitously timed
colleagues did it
focus thoughts and ideas (helpful environment)
focused me
a practical exercise
line manager promoting it
encouraged by line manager (also attending)
good timing
blocked- to move forward with my career
clarify where I want to be
skills to move on/ out
no expectations
to review where I'm at
limited opportunities for external networking
PPDR- career move (being seen to have done it)
Confidence building/ low self confidence
Time out from work

enjoyment
time out
give your mind space to think
a day off work
Time
time between sessions
time wasting
Influence of location
Catering issues- disturbing, privacy issues
Interest value of being in different location
Gender issues
Older female role models
Working with older women
majority directed at women.
male (cave men)
male chauvinism/ patronising women
an alternative 'old boy' network
creates an artificial environment, which is not really the real world
Building relationships
testing the water
not open or honest
people I've never laid eyes on before
some people you never exchange words
build relationships with other women
body language, the other bits of communication that really are quite critical sometimes.
Inter generational female relationships
coffee breaks and lunch breaks- meet interesting people
Comparing with others
meet people from all Universities over the UK
benchmarking yourself against other organisations is it always a very useful thing to do
similar people (career level)- compare experiences
seeing things through different eyes
coffee breaks and lunch breaks- meet interesting people
Home groups
underused
more privacy
more comfortable in home group
bringing things back to the small groups
share with like minded people

trust came quickly
similar experiences= bonding
very secure
friendships we built/ trust
talk about the course
Discussions
different views
informal conversations about practice are an important part of improving things
Facilitation
<i>praise</i>
did a good job
encouraged people to share and talked well
kept things moving on the right pace the program.
extremely good job of keeping the conversation flowing, but also hearing everyone
<i>criticisms</i>
should be run by external facilitators
Insecure about/ distrust for/ emotionally insensitive (facilitators)
pinned me down
a but patronising
very slow
wasn't particularly interested in anyone else
there to tick a box in her own career
A bit patronising
Painfully slow
wasn't particularly interested in anyone else
there to tick a box in her own career
Value of activities
nothing in workbook for academics/ researchers
painfully slow
question whether coming to London purely for the action learning set would've been a worthwhile use of time
no time to do exercises
focused on what was valuable to me
a bit meaningless
a bit silly
meant to be fun
been deeply uncomfortable about some of the materials it is suggested that we hello looked at
Some of the messages coming from them slightly mixed
better to have it more targeted at smaller and more specific groups
presenting back to large group- interesting discussion
superficial discussion of the strategies and values
10 years ago big impact (AC)

Role models
very keen to show that they were confident, and to be role models
examples of poor work life balance (AC)
its not about being superwoman (AC)
Realisations
to go forward with an opportunity more often
keeping to plans
understand things about myself
subtle changes in thinking rather than revelations (AC)
sudden realisation (lightening bolt) (CS)
reinforcement
has reinforced some of the things that I already felt were the case
subtle changes in thinking rather than revelations (AC)
sudden realisation (lightening bolt) (CS)
10 years ago big impact (AC)
Challenges
Initially uncomfortable with so many people
presenting
not too challenging
getting there is challenging
challenged me on all fronts
facilitators not knowing their topic area (psychology)

Table 4: Rough data coding in Nvivo

Rough coding in Nvivo (June 2015- 10 interviews- SB/ A)
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Descriptive Women/ men people guest speakers facilitators content timing location participants Activities Content/resources	Conceptual time opportunity role model delivery message career network values support change performing opportunities personal development confidence friend Adjectives helpful similar negative positive uncomfortable assertive
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Table 5 Initial themes/ subthemes from Interviews

August 2015
<i>Conceptual perception level</i>
Outside the routine
Wider community
Realisations/insights
Challenge and anxiety
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>presenting/ performing to peers</i> <i>presenting/ performing to managers</i>
Positive Self/ professional image
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Encouraging/finding courage</i> <i>raising self confidence</i> <i>affirmation</i> <i>empowering/anti-oppressive</i> <i>self-work</i> <i>personal integrity</i>
Safe/ unsafe/confidentiality
Feeling inspired

Energy and enjoyment- fun, games, joking
Relationship level
<i>Meeting</i>
<i>Networking</i>
Support and sharing
Challenges, power dynamics and tensions
• <i>facilitator style</i>
• <i>personality types</i>
• <i>gender</i>
Descriptive level
Programme delivery and facilitation (comments/ preferences)
Building Skills /types of learning
Group work
Academics v customer service staff
Coaching and mentoring
Location
Time

Table 6: Reduced codes full ethnography (unfinished) October 2015

Motivations
Personal / career
Relationships/ roles
Networking
Support and sharing
Location and Environment
Outside routine/ silo
Programme organisation/ facilitation
Politics/power/dynamics/ tensions
Safety/ trust
Skills development /learning
Coaching
Reflexive/ emotion work
Learning from others
Informal learning

Fun, enjoyment,
Challenges
Academics/ corporate service staff
Outcomes
Opportunities/ frustrations
Realisations/ insights
Positive self image
Sense of community

Table 7: Final codes December 15

isolated/ cut off
outside the routine/ environment
performing/ performances
Power/dynamics/ politics
delivery/ facilitation
skills and training
organisation/institution
leadership styles
inspiration/ role models
academics v customer services
performance management
coaching
dealing with stress
building relationships
groups and teams

reflexivity/ emotion work
self-image/ esteem
longer term benefits
realisations and insights
learning and reinforcement
support and sharing
wider community/ broader vision

Chapter 5 : Findings

Over a period of twenty months, I participated in staff learning and development events, selected for variety and convenience. The activities ranged from a half-day socio drama workshop to a three-day residential event. One of my roles as a qualitative researcher is to ‘breathe life’ into the data, while remaining true to the participants I quote and situations I portray. My intention was to immerse myself in the culture of LDPs as extensively as time and circumstance permitted. Following the advice of Wolcott, I included in my fieldwork everything that I experienced from the onset to completion of the field based study, developing a deep personal involvement and commitment to my chosen arena, in order to gain an understanding that I could share with others (Wolcott, 2008). Although in the temporal sense my data collecting had to be intermittent, I placed myself in a fieldwork gathering ‘state of mind’ (Wolcott, 2008) endeavouring to remain alert, inquiring and open to all opportunities for investigating and understanding the ‘soft skills experience.’

In the following sections, I present a wide and faithful collective staff trajectory, mindful of those who generously gave up their time, and shared their thoughts, feelings and experiences for this project. To allow for some demarcation between my own feelings and perceptions and those of other participants, I begin with selected autoethnographic reflections written during my time as an actor within the social world of staff learning and development. Direct quotes from my journal are in italics. I have written this section in the present tense, to remain true to the record in my journal.

5.1 Entering the social world

As Ballantine reminds us, social worlds not only exist outside us, but are also something we carry within us (Ballantine, 2014, p4) as feelings, memories and reflections. I begin my fieldwork proper in the autumn of 2014, as a researcher-participant on a four-day women’s development programme. The programme is

conducted within the university, yet on entering the room I have the distinct impression of stepping over some invisible threshold, and joining a recognisable but novel learning and development social world. Unusually for me I arrive early, and am surprised to see a large number of women already seated in a large semi-circle around the room. I am asked to sign a register, put on my sticky name badge, help myself to coffee, and ‘feel welcome’ to browse the self-development books displayed on tables at the back. The first line entry of my journal expresses my sense of wariness as the lone academic researcher on a personal development course with 36 other women:

Girl in a room asks, “Why am I here?” I feel a bit old and shy. Adele playing in the background . . . am I the only academic here? I spot a couple of familiar faces; otherwise it is a room full of women – many ages and ethnicities, now starting to talk a little to each other . . . I’m conscious that the facilitators now know I am a researcher. Will they be watching me taking notes?

At the beginning of the day, we are given an explanation about the programme. We are reminded that this day is for us, but that there are golden rules, and we should try to stay for the duration of the day. I sense an inner panic, a slight claustrophobia. How do I feel about not taking any time out during the day? At 10 am it seems a big deal. Then we have a guest speaker. She has a success story to tell us. She advises us about making a plan; ‘think about *who* opens doors for you or better still build that door yourself. It’s a continuous progress,’ she says. ‘You have to keep on developing yourself.’ It’s a gutsy story but I wonder, does she ever get time to rest? I feel exhausted listening to her. I’m taking note of her tips, maybe I can learn from them. I start to wonder about ‘success stories,’ and why they feature so highly nowadays.

Next, we are back in groups. As we move around, I think of parties and musical chairs. The ‘post it’ notes we use to write down our thoughts add a colourful dimension. We are exploring what we want to get out of the programme. Most of our group (and

other groups) have at least some goals in common. Then, as I am beginning to feel more relaxed, we are asked to get into twos and I realise that everyone else is paired up. In an instant, I am transported back to my school days and feel ‘*left out of this game.*’ But the facilitator intervenes and suggests that we work as a threesome. I later note in my diary how these concerns about social acceptance and rejection surface in me during group selection exercises, and it leaves me wondering whether I am a ‘rejection-sensitive’ person (DeWall and Bushman, 2011), or if everyone feels this way.

5.1.2 Emotion work

A significant purpose of face-to-face activities on LDPs is to cut across role barriers and to create a sense of openness, trust and bonding between people from different backgrounds (Nardi and Whittaker, 2002). Inevitably this involves working with and revealing one’s own emotions, as I discover on the second day of a course:

It’s more about feelings today. I’d have preferred smaller groups- talking over others gave me a headache. The quiet times and visualisation exercise was a relief. I meet more people today and, do some useful networking. We watch a video about a horribly injured accident survivor, who overcomes his handicap and becomes a para-sportsman. I feel moved to tears (others are crying) and afterwards I question this type of emotional manipulation. I have used it myself in classes and it’s powerful, but I think the impact needs to be discussed afterwards.

In another exercise that day, we are asked to consider our (perceived) personal weaknesses, and how they might become our strengths. The first person in our group to speak says she is over emotional. ‘This is a problem’, she says, ‘because people judge you by it.’ I confess to being the same, and tell an anecdote about how I cried all the way through an important meeting. How I was angry with myself afterwards for not putting forward the points I wanted to make. I also discover that there are

limits to my willingness to disclose or discuss personal feelings and views with people I barely know. I make efforts to 'bond' with the younger women from corporate services (CS) in my 'home group,' but only to a limited degree.

First impressions, we will get along okay, but part of me wishes I was with more mature women. Too quickly I feel the 'mummy' of the group. The youngest is shy and sweet; I want to protect her from any upsets. When she can't think of anything to say I encourage her. I weigh up how much of my life I would disclose to her.

The next exercise is more about us as women. The group I'm with now is less placid. Some of the young women have strong views. They say they want better drugs as solutions to their health- the older ones of us suggest they consider alternatives. Maybe we think we have more experience of what it is to be a woman. There is a slight sense of friction, but it passes. As we exchange stories I start to relax. I begin to feel wanted by this group. I feel I have skills to offer them. I have been feeling like a 'dirty researcher,' but it seems they find my role interesting. There is some definite bonding going on. We are all girls together, and over the day we may become friends.

Then, we have to consider gaps in support. How we can fill them. We have to think where these gaps might lie and whom we might need to locate and work with. In our groups again we are asked to brainstorm a grid of our various skills, and to consider what we have to offer others. The more assertive of us seem to remember lots of skills.

I am pleased when someone from my group approaches me. 'You have the skills I'm most interested in,' in she says. 'If you run a course I'd like to come.' Self-doubt fades, a possibility I have put aside starts to reform in my mind. Maybe I'm too shy about some of the things I do. Maybe the facilitators are right, we just have to go for it. But then I remember why it never happened. I was simply too busy, and probably still am.

After the goodbyes I wonder what I have got from the day. I hear two other participants asking each other the same question. 'It was better than I expected,' one says. Actually I think it was rather like what I expected. Interesting to meet new people, good networking, a little repetitive, not that challenging as yet. We have workbooks to fill out. I can't say I am overjoyed about that, but I will do it nonetheless.

5.1.3 Coaching

The most extensive programme in which I participate, a coaching and mentoring programme, takes four months to complete, and involves written assignments, co-coaching and working with our own coaching clients under supervision. Our group is an even mix of academics and administrative staff. In comparison with the other LDPs I have attended, this programme has a more academic flavour, which suits my personal learning inclinations. Sitting around tables watching PowerPoint presentations is not especially stimulating or unduly challenging. *'I feel more within my comfort zone being in a more formal classroom situation,'* I write. *'Maybe having a desk in front of me, or having the chance to freely ask questions about the theory is also important.'*

Much of what is covered on the first morning concerns the ethos of the programme, the role of the coach and creating a 'coaching culture.' We are seated in a rather small room. It is quite intimate, which makes the paired group work rather difficult. The facilitator speaks about how it is important to keep boundaries between coaching and counselling, which leads to some murmurs of dissent from my end of the table. 'It is about being mindful of what's going on inside,' we say. We also discuss the role of emotions in counselling and coaching. There is some disagreement about the place of emotions and if they need to be acknowledged in coaching. Is there a message that my 'emotional self' is not welcome here? The general opinion around the table is that

there are always emotions involved in interactions, and when you ask people about themselves, emotions will follow.

On the third week of the coaching programme, I am paired up with coaching partner who is dissimilar to me in many respects; he works in corporate services and I am a lecturer, he is big and I am small, and so on. Working with my unlikely partner is surprisingly easy; he is funny, enthusiastic and a very good listener. By the end of my first session I write about *'feeling very upbeat and motivated.'* At our second meeting, when I take on the role as coach, I feel I am behaving more naturally, practising active and summarising our discussion well. Our conversation prompts me to set myself goals, which I might otherwise have been reluctant to do. For instance, when I go home I triple my connections on LinkedIn, and post my recent work on ResearchGate. In my journal I write about how I am *'enjoying the fact that I'm connecting with more people even if it is not yielding anything significant as yet.'*

5.1.4 Performance and self work

Socio drama is a form of experiential learning in which role-play, theatrical methods and props, such as masks, are central to the learning experience (Jones, 2001). In the early phase of my fieldwork, I attend a socio drama workshop, during which we explore and reflect on alternative approaches for tackling challenging interactions with students. We begin the session in pairs, discussing a memorably challenging incident we have encountered in our teaching practise. My colleague describes how she had been almost lynched by a group of students who were upset about their marks being downgraded to a grade E, and this leads to a long discussion about student behaviour. Next, we act out a challenging situation in a classroom. We all choose roles and agree on a scenario. Interestingly, the one person who sits out during this exercise never really 'gets' the idea of role-play and becomes genuinely frustrated when the 'students' misbehave. Every so often the facilitator says, 'freeze!' and two of us swap roles. We also do something called 'shadowing' which proves to be a fairly chaotic exercise. When it is my turn, I decide to be a scatter-brained teacher and

overact this role. This slightly embarrasses me later, but it makes some people laugh and helps remove our inhibitions. As well as being fun, I feel enthused by this workshop and resolve to incorporate some of these dramatic techniques in my own classes.

I generally enjoy role-play, but there are instances during my fieldwork when a scenario feels too real to be emotionally comfortable. During one LDP session, we are asked to consider a situation about which we feel unhappy or exploited, and work in groups of three to practise our assertiveness in turn. I find this exercise very stressful. I am working with two younger colleagues and find their accents difficult to follow, especially as the noise level in the room is very high. I find going into role and facing my virtual boss is disconcerting. My colleague proves to quite formidable as a boss and I feel awkward, nervous and surprisingly irritated by my boss's intransigence. I experience a headache and want the exercise to end. Following this exercise I feel somewhat deflated. My self-perception and self-image has been challenged by a younger, less experienced colleague, and it takes me a while to reconcile this.

5.1.5 Meetings with stakeholders and interviews

I am seizing opportunities to talk with people around the University about my research. Today I meet with x to who is in charge of a large project on mentoring. We discuss the present situation as regards mentoring across University, and how this particular mentoring scheme fits with the coaching and mentoring certificate. As is sometimes the case in the University, there are duplicate or similar schemes running in different departments, and I'm still unclear about the differences. For instance, I was told categorically by x that the coaching and mentoring programme was separate to the mentoring scheme, and so put my name down for the recent mentoring workshop. However, speaking with x from coaching and mentoring it would simply have been a repetition of what I had already covered on the coaching course, so I'll give it a miss. Are other people experiencing the same confusion?

This evening I meet with xx to thrash out some ideas on how to encourage more academics to engage in soft skill staff development activities. What is it that discourages academics to join? We agree that one of the problems is the lack of time for staff. Nevertheless it is interesting that I the only academic out of 32 women who've enrolled on my recent course. Certainly a number of women mentioned that a line manager or colleague suggested that the course might benefit them, and the majority of participants are under 40. Does that suggest a pattern? We also discussed the fact that academics are more critical and might find the philosophy of the course simplistic. These are interesting points and I need to give them some consideration.

5.1.6 The residential

Towards the end of my fieldwork, I participate in a residential event during which academics from across the university come together in a large country hotel for something of a 'pow wow.' Although it has a serious purpose, the conviviality of the event, aided by unusually good weather and pleasant surroundings, puts most of us in a relaxed and creative frame of mind. Soon after arrival, we are launched into a fairly frenetic icebreaking activity, which does not really work because no one knows what he or she are supposed to do, but nevertheless it is a good way of getting acquainted. The main purpose of the residential event is for each team to produce a new module, and on the second day we are tasked with creating a 4 minute pitch to present a 'Dragon's Den' style panel of student reps. This time pressured exercise engenders a sense of competitiveness between the teams, and when my team achieves good marks from the panel, we are slightly smug about our success. Later on that day, I find opportunities to talk with people about my research, such as during an evening swim with some colleagues. It's really interesting how productive these informal conversations can be. I'm beginning to think that the structure that we impose on learning and development events can be too regimented, and that cross fertilisation of ideas takes place more naturally in less formal settings. Rather than just being people associated with work roles, there is a levelling, humanising effect to these casual interactions.

5.2 Interviews and participant observation

In between or subsequent to partaking in the events described in my autoethnography section, I recruited and interviewed participants who had attended different programmes, or who had managed or facilitated them. The range of programmes, participants and interview methods are explained in my methodology chapter. LDPs discussed by participants included leadership skills, personal and professional development, research-based skills, coaching, mindfulness, socio drama and resilience. 5 main areas emerged from my analysis of interview data: **hooks, prompts and incentives; activities on LDPs; performing; relationship building; energy and emotion; and experiential learning.** Following these themes, and subthemes within them, I will now weave together participants' accounts with more of my own ethnographic observations and reflections, including conversations with stakeholders and observations concerning faculty staff learning events. To preserve anonymity, role titles of participants have been excluded, however some distinctions have been maintained between academic (AC) and corporate service (CS) staff.

5.3 Hooks, Prompts and Incentives

Participants identified a variety of hooks, prompts and incentives, which had motivated them to attend particular courses. While some were intrinsic (e.g. challenging oneself, becoming more assertive, taking time out, to aid career progression) or extrinsic (e.g. the expectation of a line manager, recommendation by a colleague) frequently participants described a blend of both:

I felt as if I wanted to make a bit more of a (life/career) plan for myself. So there was that aspect, and then, I think I'm relatively aware of things I'm less strong at, like assertiveness, confidence. . . . So the idea of having a course that helped you plan but also made you think about things was quite good. A4

Several participants saw their time on LDPs as a chance for self-reflection and ‘me’ time; *‘I needed that person time, I think, to put myself first. And it was a useful opportunity I think to get out of the office, and to look at the issues in my working life and say, “what do you really want?”’* Over and above their practical use, learning and development courses were seen as time away from one’s desk or usual responsibilities. Participants who spoke about this said that they welcomed the opportunity to *‘be taken away from your office, your emails, taken away from the daily grind,’* to *‘step out of the usual routine,’* and have the *‘space to think about things, which in everyday life you tend to put push to one side.’* Keeping this distinction between course activities and the workplace was emphasised by facilitators; *‘They (the facilitators) said ‘don’t bring any work, don’t do anything.’*

Although the location of various LDPs varied, most of the programmes discussed by participants were in rooms or venues away from the usual work environment. The residential events (as also noted in my autoethnography) were especially viewed as opportunities to *‘to go out of university and out of that brain space.’* One participant explained that it was just really nice *‘to be away, and be out in nature, and in a nice environment with nice weather and nice people. So the environment really helped.’*

What is referred to in the literature as the ‘silo effect’ (Tett, 2015) or ‘silo mentality’ (Hotărăn, 2009), with the compartmentalising of work spheres and people in organisations around functional departments, can lead to poor interpersonal communication with people working in a unilateral way. One academic in this study referred to a ‘monastery model’ operating in some areas of the university, where ‘everyone has their own little office’, which they saw as non-conducive to social interaction and engagement. A few participants spoke of feeling isolated in their present role or department, within a large-scale organisation. One AC working on an out of city campus described it as *‘A sort of branch line on an outpost in this kind of university- a clique that I seem to be in.’* A CS staff member whose office was located in central London but was away from the main campuses also expressed feelings about being *‘really out on a limb . . . really out of touch with what is going on, we*

don't really know what's happening in the rest of the university.' Participants felt that, although it is easy to communicate via digital technology, the faces and personalities behind the names remained unknown. LDPs were seen as opportunities to 'meet different people from other departments, share views, share ideas. Find out what's happening-because it's a big institution':

I think one of the greatest things about the HR development courses is for staff to get out of their comfort zones, and go to a space where they meet others and connect and learn how others and doing things, and make connections that are more than just an email, name and signature. K11

5.3.1 Support and encouragement

Participation on LDPs during work hours requires the approval of one's line manager, and for the more extensive courses, one's head of department. Participants reported different levels of encouragement from more senior members of staff. One academic researcher commented on how his particular of head of department was 'very, very supportive of development requests,' others had requests turned down. The type of HR courses offered to staff to a large extent mirrors the staff rank within the organisation (Kezar and Lester, 2009; Mumford *et al.*, 2007), and being put forward for a leadership course could feel quite an achievement; *'my line manager put me forward . . . It's quite a popular programme, so it was quite flattering.'* While most participants appreciated line managers recommending them for a particular programme, a couple of CS staff were suspicious about why they has been encouraged to attend a particular course; *'we've had a little bit of a tense relationship to date, this guy and I, so it felt to me as if he was promoting it in the hope that I might become a little bit more like what he would hope me to be.'* One CS participant had felt *'a little bit pushed into it instead of choosing to go on it'* and suspected there were 'political reasons' behind this mild coercion. Having to work with someone who had been or felt pressured into attending a particular course could have a negative effect on everyone else:

I remember being on a course . . . it was something like ‘managing difficult people’ . . . and this guy said, “I’m on this course because I’ve been made go on this course.” And it showed, and it was awful. And I suddenly thought, “you can’t use these things as a stick. You know, if there are performance management issues, this is not place for them.” E/1/A 12

5.3.2 Entrepreneurial motivations

Both AC and CS staff participants interviewed saw LDPs as means of focusing on their development, however their perception of themselves and their career path in relation to both the course material and the wider organisation varied. For the younger CS staff on time-limited contracts, participation on an LDP was viewed as part of their job, and did not necessarily imply that they considered their skills or present work as unsatisfactory; *‘I’m a get in, get out (person), doing what I need to do.’* Another CS participant explained it in this way; *‘Even though you’re embedded in the contract - you’re always thinking of what the next step is where you will be going.’* I describe these participants as ‘career nomads.’ While some of the CS staff expressed positive views about their career development, others spoke of how feeling ‘blocked,’ or stuck in their particular role within the university had led them to consider moving jobs:

I think it (the timing the course) was also a good time to me personally to go on that course as I had a lot of frustrations about the desire to move on and not get stuck . . . to kind of find a way to move myself on and find a (new) career.’ C17

As a group, the academics expressed more ambiguities concerning their future careers inside or beyond the university, with some regarding their visible engagement in personal and professional development activities as something of a necessity; *‘One does everything to be primed for any opportunities that come up. . . As a professional*

you need to do that.’ Another AC strongly believed that they needed to show initiative if you want to get ahead or be noticed:

You have to be proactive . . . within the University, you respond to things like the xx (change initiative), things like that . . . basically getting to know people, put (ting) yourself forward in situations . . . perhaps outside familiar ground- I think that you need to be the right sort of person to do that though. G9

A high proportion of the academic participants in this study had business backgrounds, or undertook outside consultancy work, and as such may not constitute a truly representative sample of academics in terms of their views on entrepreneurship. Most academics were, according to one AC participant with a business background, very bad at self-marketing and self-promotion. But, sensing the neoliberal climate they explained; *‘You must market and promote yourself, that’s the world we are in.’* Some of the ACs had believed themselves, or their colleagues, to be under recent threat of redundancy and assumed a more calculating attitude towards taking up staff LDPs. One spoke about getting, *‘as much out of the university’*- as they could- *‘that was my thought really.’* Another explained how, even though a particular LDP had been scheduled during their busiest semester, they had thought; *‘I’m going to take space with this, and everything else can work around it . . . to show that I am doing personal and professional development, and if I have to leave and get a job somewhere else.’*

The number of CS staff voluntarily attending the personal and professional development genre of courses exceeded the AC staff. In the case of courses that spanned weeks or months, staff had to weigh up their different time commitments; *‘In terms of “how does this help me in my academic professional journey?” I think that is just not apparent to academics.’* Another AC explained why they thought academics in general were less likely to attend soft skills LDPs;

I think a lot - and this might sound very unkind to my fellow academics- a lot of work is driven in a sense by academic testosterone . . . it is very much based upon doing research, publishing your papers and books, standing there as the authority in front of students. E14

5.3.3 Self-improvement

While some participants were relative novices in terms of learning and development courses, others (who I will call ‘course hoppers’) had taken part in a whole range of workshops and programmes both within and outside the university; *‘I did a whole range of things, from time management to a men’s development project, and change projects, all sorts of different offerings.’* These multiple course attendees were particularly drawn to programmes that incorporated different types of self-care practices; mindfulness, self-compassion, coping with stress, resilience, assertiveness, and so on. One participant explained what attracted them to these types of courses;

I realised that I really enjoyed . . . the quietening, especially during the academic year when things get a little bit hectic . . . (I chose) mindfulness and self-compassion, because . . . I tend to self-disparage, and ruminate a lot. And although I did the resilience as well within university, I didn’t think it was sufficient E/I/H 13

When asked why they had chosen to partake in a soft skills course, several participants (both AC and CS staff) spoke of their lack of self-confidence or assertiveness; *‘I think I’m relatively aware of things I’m less strong at, areas like assertiveness, confidence.’* As one AC on a leadership programme expressed it; *‘If we had all been more proactive and more confident in the first place, we might have been able to resolve (our issues) without the course.’* As one might expect, programme facilitators and staff involved in the management of soft skills courses, voiced positive sentiments about both the ideologies and practices featuring on particular types of LDPs, and generally identified themselves as being of that world; *‘I’m very*

much into all kinds of experiential learning I suppose. And self-managed skills development.' Another facilitator explained how their journey of self-development had changed them as person:

I just feel that my whole outlook as expanded since I've been coaching and really since I started studying psychology. You know, you're thinking, and your understanding of the way that other people think, changes and expands so much. K15

The therapy-like approach of some courses did not, however, suit everybody. One young CS participant described the person development programme they attended as 'too touch-feely' for their taste.

5.3.4 Disincentives

Finding time to fit in an LDP course for both academics and CS staff could be a problem, particularly for those with pressing deadlines to meet. The academics in particular found it harder to leave their other work commitments behind, and some admitted to having left in the breaks to look at emails or even have meetings. In the case of courses that spanned weeks or months, staff had to juggle not only work, but also family commitments and issues:

I had a particular issued this semester with my (xxx) falling ill . . . which crossed over with some of the course things, so balancing that was my concern. I was having to do a lot of work life balance . . . so I just crawled through it basically.' G10

On programmes which were more content driven, having to rush through course material was a source of frustration for both participants and trainers, who felt that too much content was crammed into little time: '*The problem with the course is where we have all the taught stuff sort of crammed in at the beginning . . . there's such a lot of*

content, that really has to be gone through.’ Trying to juggle a full time job with reading all the course materials could be quite difficult when; *‘there’s a lot of material to take in.’* Most people (CS staff and academics) valued the addition of hand-outs and on line resources, but finding the time to engage properly with all these materials was rarely possible for participants from all work areas; *‘I wasn’t always able to give it my best attention within two weeks to reading material. But I think I can go back to it.’*

Where the programme involved a lot of contact time, this could also be a problem for staff. In the case of one leadership programme, whose participants were quite widely dispersed, travelling to the venue was particularly time consuming. One academic expressed the view that the theoretical aspects of the course could have been covered through blended learning; *‘I am not sure that it needed people to be travelling all around the country for four whole days.’* Another conundrum for participants was choosing between the wide range of LDPs on offer, as many different learning and development activities were promoted to staff, mostly on the Staff Intranet; *‘I mean they’re all sorts . . . I see various notices as I walk in on different doors and information pointing people in different directions to things, at surprisingly regular intervals.’* Information concerning courses was often quite brief, and some participants felt they would have liked more details to help them decide. With so many LDPs advertised, it was important that staff could distinguish between different events and quickly grasp what they had to offer. The nomenclature of an event for instance, could be said to represent the ‘essence’ of a thing¹, and in the case of an LDP could resonate positively or negatively with some staff:

I have to admit I do take offence at the name x especially since the male version is called x, which suggests that men already have the skills they just need to find a way of navigating through; whereas for women it’s called x- as

¹ Although Shakespeare’s Juliet famously declares: “What’s in a name? / That which we call a rose/ by any other name would smell so sweet.” Romeo and Juliet, Act II, scene II

if we somehow women need some sort of assistance to jump our way upwards!

A3

5.4 Activities on LDPs

Learning on LDPs is largely of the experiential and informal variety, with incidental learning taking place through extra-curricular interactions, such as on residential events; *‘The residential nature of it was useful because I had some very interesting discussions at dinner with people.’* The types of activities that took place on the various LDPs examined ranged from the highly personal (e.g. meditation, resilience, sharing), through the interpersonal (e.g. role-play and games, group presentations) to the more organisational goal focused (e.g. away days, and cross university learning events). The general format on the most LDPs was to begin the day with a whole group presentation and briefing, but at some point divide the cohort into smaller groups (often six to eight). During interviews, participants expressed their general views and feelings concerning LDPs at length and in detail, which were, unsurprisingly, varied. Good learning experiences were described as ‘exciting,’ ‘inspiring,’ ‘meaningful,’ ‘fun’ and ‘embedded in theory;’ *‘It just took our activity and then embedded it within theory and within leadership, and within professional life . . . it made it more rounded more memorable, more meaningful.’* The best experiences could broaden your horizon and give you *‘strategies for the future.’* A number of participants expressed their preference for experiential learning over the theoretical or taught elements of a programme. ‘When questioned about memorable experiences on a programme, most participants focused on the experiential and practical aspects of the course; *‘For me it was more a practical exercise that is going to give me four days in which to think about these things and maybe get some strategies on doing things.’* One participant explained that, in the case of experiential events such as mindfulness, the ‘deeper’ effects were often realised over time; *‘with mindfulness it is quite latent, because . . . it kind of settles with you for a while and then it blooms.’*

5.4.1 Academics (ACs) v Corporate Service (CS) staff

In this study, participants were interviewed as individuals rather than according to any role or job description, however from interview data, certain preferential differences between AC and CS staff emerged. For example, several CS participants expressed a preference for the relative intimacy of small group work, whereas a number of academics voiced appreciation for wider group discussions such as described by one participant below:

You'd sort of go around the room and find commonalities between different groups of people, and opinions. It was also very interesting to see how people dealt with things - very different types of environment, different types of module . . . and trying to figure out ways to work in together. H22

One facilitator described how these learning style differences between academics and CS staff had to be carefully negotiated; *'sometimes . . . it can be quite difficult to manage different people's needs . . . academics like to debate the grey areas . . . and not to lose the attention of people who maybe aren't so interested in, in those debates.'* A learning process, which CS staff in particular spoke of appreciatively, was the use of psychometric tests and similar tools. One CS participant expressed their surprise at the personal accuracy of the Myers Briggs psychometric test (McCrae and Costa, 1989), describing it as *'perhaps one of the most useful tools that I discovered.'* Another CS participant felt that completing this test had helped them to understand different aspects about themselves; *'I actually realised that the things I'd been learning to do were causing me stress, because they, they, take more effort.'* Academics, on the other hand, made particular mention of activities that involved *'a certain level of abstraction'*, and made you think; *'a little more broadly.'* Of the two sectors, academics were more critical of the general pitching of content of the courses they attended. One academic complained about *'death by Power-Point'*, another that study materials were over simple or out dated. Another thought that on their particular course (which was aimed at academics) there was little in the programme workbook

which was specifically tailored for academics or researchers; *'I don't know if they thought if we put a bunch of academics together it will be good enough.'* When asked why they thought there were often less academics on LDP courses, one academic said that; *'In terms of how does this help me in my academic professional journey?' It's not that apparent to academics . . . better to do a course aligned to your profession, or your research.'*

5.5 Performing

In addition to the day-to-day performances that take place wherever individuals interact together (Goffman, 2012), most of the LDPs examined in this study included elements of deliberate social performance, often in the form of presentations performed in front of peers, facilitators, or an invited audience (e.g., line managers, students). On some LDPs these presentations were informal, even impromptu, whereas on others (e.g. one leadership programme) they were observed and commented on by invited guests including line managers. Even when performing in a relatively informal atmosphere some participants felt deeply self-conscious; *'I always blush, I've got a vicious face, that's a problem.'* While both AC and CS staff reported performance nerves, performing in front of their peers was particularly nerve-racking for some academics who, despite years of teaching experience reported feeling *'well out of (their) comfort zone.'* Getting through a 'scary' performance could feel like a rite of passage:

You know nothing terrible has she happened to me, I haven't burst into flames as a result of doing it, so I'm quite encouraged on a personal level. And the fact that I actually did do all those things that I was terrified to do. Like standing up in front of those people

On some of the courses examined, experienced or high achieving members of staff were invited in as guest speakers, or 'role models,' to speak to the audience of participants. Some participants found the guest speakers inspiring, even 'brilliant' and

‘highly motivational; *‘the guest speakers I saw, I found every one of those stories really interesting . . . seeing the pride that they had in themselves . . . confirmed the idea that you should celebrate all your achievements.’* Other participants expressed more critical opinions about the presentation styles and messages of certain speakers. There was a fine line between coming across as self-assured and over performing; *‘There were some people I would describe as ‘primadonnas.’ I think they were quite keen on you know, their stage, their space.’* Sometimes the values that guest speakers and role models represented, and the messages being put across, did not resonate with a participant. Two female participants critiqued the emphasis on career ambitions and achievements of some speakers, over personal and family interests:

The first woman who came in and spoke said that her partner lives on the other side of the world . . . she regularly works to all hours and she has no work life balance. And I just thought, “ Well, that’s not a very good example to bring in is it?” F7

Another participant humorously noted that the role models in their programme had included a high number of ‘sporty achievers’; *‘There was a sort of subliminal message. “If you do cycling or something you will get on in management.”* Also critiqued was the use of evocative material on LDPs, such as the use of ‘aspirational’ videos, such as the use of moving video about a para-sportsman; *‘When I saw the video I started to cry. It was just overwhelming, I wasn’t expecting it, it just came from nowhere.’*

5.5.1 Working in groups and teams

With the exception of courses such as mindfulness or relaxation, most activities on LDPS involve extensive face-to-face work in groups and teams. Working and performing with a new group can be challenging, as participants have to adapt to and negotiate with a group of adults with different personalities, learning styles, attitudes and goals; *‘The group’s quite a large one so you can be working with different people.’*

Most people enjoyed working with a variety of individuals and groups, rather than remaining in one group, however working out roles in a group or action learning set could take time, as participants had to work out the personality types within a group (George, 1990); *‘Every time you’re working with new people you are trying to test the water with them.’* Group or team presentations team are a frequently employed group competence activity, which, depending on the time allowed for this and the skills mix of participants, could be very demanding:

I found it extremely challenging to have 2 hours to put together something which was in anyway coherent, with somebody in my team thinking so differently - you know we were throwing ideas in which were plainly not clear to everybody ultimately to include what she thought the module would be about, so I mean it was . . . the most daunting thing I had to do. H19

Another type of activity discussed by participants was that of action learning. A experiential form of learning owing much to the work of John Dewey (Dewey, 2008) and Reginald Revans (Revans, 1993), action learning combines the development of people within an organisation with action for change by active engagement (Revans, 1993; Pedlar, 1997). One participant thought that a positive aspect of action learning sets were that they encouraged you *‘to get different perspectives . . . by the very nature of those action learning sets, you get this idea, “wow- you look at it differently to me!”* Action learning sets are social events, and another participant who was part of an action learning group outside the university saw it as an opportunity to let off steam about work matters; *‘(I said) I’d like just to have a rant, I just want to get it all out . . . and that rambling and talking it through will help me clarify it in my head.’* On the other hand, there needed to be clear aims and a clear task for action learning groups to work. As this participant explained it;

You need to be clear about when you, and the people around you, are engaged in, what's called 'anti-task behaviour' . . . you get paralysis by analysis, or you just talk the whole time and then it's about talking and not doing. C17

5.5.2 Creativity and role-play

Much has been written about the benefits of creativity and role-play in both child and adult learning and development (Smith, 2009; Hromek and Roffey, 2009; Baruah and Paulus, 2009), and most participants in this study (including myself) were enthusiastic about the more creative and playful aspects of LDPs; a representative view was: *'You know, adults can play as well as children and, and I think that kind of playfulness is really good from the point of innovation and creativity.'* Being away from a university culture and environment seemed to encourage a more creative licence, whereas within the university itself, one participant thought, there was; *'a certain culture that can potentially inhibit creativity of coaching and development activities.'* Performing in front of others meant you were obliged to *'go outside (your) shaky box.'* Whether or not you enjoyed these types of activities was seen as a personality thing; *'Well I really enjoyed it, but then I would, because I like kind of doing physical stuff and experiential learning.'* Engaging in sometimes-bizarre exercises could be amusing and fun:

It (the programme) had a very interactive dynamic. But you know, I came out of the course and my wife asked what do you do today, and I said, "I had to be a sheep. I was blindfolded and someone blew a whistle to direct me into a pen." It's kind of not your standard sort of management exercises. So it was a lot of fun doing stuff. B6

Fun as this was for some, for other staff the effect of performing in front of colleagues you respected was unnerving; *'I found it the most daunting thing I had to do. But I did it - everybody was supportive- I didn't feel that I made a complete tit of myself.'*

5.5.3 Performance management

Performance management can be defined as a cycle of integrated activities that establishes a systematic link between the contribution of each employee and the overall performance of the organisation (Bach, 2005), which all University staff participate in through the PPDR process. Performance management was not, so one HR staff member assured me, about catching people out for underperforming; *'It's about how do we get even better in what we do, it's not about looking for deficiencies.'* Of the various programmes examined in this study, the one placing most emphasis on performance management was a corporate service leadership programme, described by one participant as *'very structured in terms of roles and skills.'* This LDP included a 360-review process, which required feedback from line managers and other colleagues; *'We had to fill in the questionnaires and, ask our team to, and . . . our line manager and peer group.'* The fact that the review was largely self-directed was appreciated by one participant; *'I was a little bit nervous about what I would find out but, yeah. I think I was excited because it was so helpful.'* Participants on this programme were also expected to attend coaching sessions as part of the performance management process, along with the review process. However, if the coaching session did not yield any benefits this could feel like a waste of effort:

I walked out (of the last coaching session) feeling I just wasted my time . . . maybe it is the dynamic between myself and my coach . . . I'm really interested in career progression, but it just didn't seem to go anywhere when we (the coachee and coach) had a conversation (about it). C20

Two other CS participants, who had more positive experiences of coaching, nevertheless found completing both review and coaching sessions impossible in what was such a busy timetable: *'We are supposed to have three coaching sessions by the end of the course. And I would say that 90% of us have had only one coaching session.'* They attributed this to the additional pressures the programme had put on

them, and the time it took to get all the necessary feedback; *'It put a big delay on everyone because you had to get all of these people to take the survey.'*

5.6 Relationship Building

Most participants regarded LDPs as good opportunities to network and develop contacts. The space to connect with others and be supported by work colleagues was seen as extremely valuable; *'We had a fantastic group . . . we got on right from the start. We shared very deeply about ourselves and cut through the superfluous quite quickly.'* One participant on a leadership course described how, despite them being a junior member of staff, the way their group operated was very welcoming and democratic; *'There is none of this . . . "I'm the director."'* One advantage noted by participants concerning cross-university events was that they got to meet and work with *'people with the hugely different experiences and backgrounds'* and *'develop contacts in an area where you wouldn't normally have them.'* One AC participant of a more entrepreneurial inclination used the networking opportunities to start a new partnership or enterprise; *'I remember the particular moment, which was when me and my colleague pitched an idea . . . and they said, "Yes it's great! Put it forward, we'll support it."'* Another, female, AC participant described how the congregating of middle and high-ranking females from different sectors on a leadership course had felt rather like *'replicating the "old boy" network,'* but amongst women. At the same time, she considered the career changing aspect of this type networking to be of real use *'only to the young and economically mobile.'* Not everybody found the networking opportunities they were offered useful. One researcher had found that meeting up people from other universities who worked in entirely different fields was of limited value in terms of establishing longer-term professional relationships if there was little in common. Other participants (both CS and ACs), however, did forge enduring social relationships with staff from other institutions, and continued to meet up on a regular basis; *'We had breakfast together this morning . . . we do intend to continue and we're trying to make the next date now.'*

5.6.1 Informal socialising

In addition to the mixing of peers, the informal aspects of LDPs provided opportunities for more junior staff to meet with managers in a less formal way; *'My manager's manager was on the course, and . . . I feel that she's much more approachable now if I encounter have a problem.'* The informal atmosphere at a residential could help to break down status barriers, for instance between management and "grass roots" staff. As one CS participants explained;

It was very casual- you didn't feel like it was, "us and them " . . . they were eating dinner with this, having drinks with this, and you know it was nice because . . . people from (management) from afar can be intimidating . . . it was a good atmosphere to get to know them. C17

Being on a residential was seen as a particularly good opportunity for getting to know people who you had previously known in only a vague way; *'it gave a nice kind of social/interpersonal, element to it.'* These informal encounters were seen by some as being just as important as the timetabled activities, for example having a beer in the bar on a residential event; *'what goes on around the edges . . . the informal bits, I think can also support the formal stuff.'* One participant explained how, in their opinion, the difference between informal interactions and formal interactions is that with the former you did not necessarily enter into discussions with your 'work head' on; *'you just find social and personal points of connection between different colleagues - the ones that you pass in the corridor and nod to a couple of times a week but you don't actually know, so I think it helps with a sense of community and collegiality.'* However, not everyone found it easy to socialise informally with relative strangers at a residential; *'a simple soul might say it was a lonely experience.'*

5.6.2 Trust and suspicion

LDPs feature a range of activities designed to encourage people to build trusting relationships between another such as icebreaking, problem based learning, role-play

and other relationship building devices, but many rely on the establishment of swift trust between temporary groups (Meyerson *et al.*, 1996), which can be difficult to establish. A familiar axiom on LDPs is that ‘what’s said in the room stays in the room;’ the confidentiality rule allowing people to express their emotions safely.’ This worked well for some participants; ‘ We *took very seriously the idea that what was said among us stayed amongst us, so there was a building of trust.* ’ When one person shared in this way, it could then encourage others to do so:

Just having come out of that experience of (xxx) . . . I had shared that with the group straight away because I wanted them to know, if I cried it was just part of grief you know . . . And I think that was kind of catalyst for us sharing things that were quite kind of difficult. A1

Confidentiality has long been a cornerstone of trust in relationships between professionals and their clients (Koocher, 1995), but it is more difficult to ensure when more than several people are present. One participant questioned these claims to confidentiality when discussing personal issues within a bigger group:

It’s all very well to bring together 30 or 40 people in a room, then say this is confidential, and “everybody’s here for the same thing and ‘let’s all support each other’ and then say; “ Articulate some of the problems you’re having at work or your home life.” . . . I think you need a certain level of comfort personally. F7

Role ambiguities and power differentials between people on LDPs also made some participants feel vulnerable. Mixing attendees with their line managers, on a course where people were being encouraged to explore personal and work issues, could feel problematic for more junior staff and managers; ‘*I didn't find it an issue, but my manager was like “maybe I shouldn’t be here.”*’ One participant explained it in this way; ‘*However good your relationship is (I don't know how you can) speak freely,*

knowing your boss was running the event . . . There must be a conflict of interest somewhere.’ Another participant expressed suspicions concerning the internal politics of these events, saying that; *‘walls have ears.’* In terms of expressing one’s true views, some things were safer to say outside:

I mean you have, you have to be professional, and you’ve got to be respectful. But everybody knows that, there are times in your work that . . . I might irritate people, people might irritate me, there might be some quite difficult things that it’s safer to take outside. H19

5.6.3 Gender preferences

While participants in this study expressed different viewpoints and preferences concerning single gender and mixed gender LDPs, several people (male and female) identified advantages of single gender groups in terms of sharing (e.g. *‘We are all girls together’*) and feeling that it was safe to disclose or discuss emotions; *‘The course was just men . . . I think it brought some level of safety, some sort of camaraderie . . . I mean we had real tears.’* Other participants (male and female) felt it was good to have a gender mix, because a single gender course *‘creates an artificial environment which is not really the real world.’* One female participant had been worried that having an all-female group would lead to some ‘male-bashing’ – but this had not happened. Working in a cross gender group could help you learn how to work and negotiate with both genders. One male participant described how a rather domineering male co-participant had been chastised about his military-like leadership style by two females in the group; *‘That was good because it challenged his leadership style, and maybe made him think a bit more about gender dynamics in the workplace.’*

In the day-to-day working life, communication between staff members from academic and corporate services is usually via email. One CS participant admitted that what they knew about academics within the institution was *‘very subjective- a micro feel of*

an academic.’ Perceived differences between the two work areas could hinder communication and liaison; *‘I think there is sometimes this “us and them” atmosphere and mentality. Because . . . sometimes the academics might not view corporate services in a very good light . . . we present hurdles for them.’* Mixing of academics and corporate service staff on LDPs was considered generally a good thing; *‘because you do get that cross learning and difference of opinion.’* The predominance of corporate staff on many LDPs was not, according to one programme manager, down to the actual planning of the staff development programme staff and there was no actual division made between courses for the two sectors. However, some programmes appeared to intentionally focus on corporate services. While the intent was not to exclude academics, it was easier, this manager felt, to define which sort of targets and interventions were required to develop corporate management skills, although changes in management structures within academic departments was helping in this respect.

5.6.4 *‘Leaders’ and values*

Leadership has become an important area of management education (Herman, 2007). Discussions around leadership arose because a number of participants interviewed had attended programmes in Leadership and Development, and opinions were expressed both about preferred leadership styles and what does, or does not, make a good leader. Good leaders were seen as embodying qualities such as self-awareness and empathy, rather than just being technical experts; *‘Often you find senior leaders who have been promoted for their technical skills, and are absolutely hopeless with people. And that’s where they’re having problems, it stops them progressing further up in the organisation.’* One female participant critiqued the ‘masculinised’ portrayal of women leaders and felt that the leadership course had helped them realise that they did not need to change their values concerning the benefits of a softer leadership approach. Another critiqued what they saw as the tenuous links made between neuroscience and leadership on a particular programme, which could be used to explain leadership qualities:

It (the theory behind the course) was straight back to the Great Man myth of leadership - it's about the leader (whereas) for me leadership is something that happens between people, and it's a much more complex phenomenon . . . And then to kind of justify it on basis of neuroscience, seems to be fundamentally flawed. K25

5.7 Energy and Emotion

As social worlds, LDPs can be, or at least seek to be, dynamic and highly interactive arenas. In interviews, when a participant used the word 'energy' to describe some feature of an LDP, they were indicating that the session had been lively and engaging, for example; *'There was quite a lot of energy. It got harder obviously . . . to keep up the energy, because it was a lot of work on our projects . . . (but the) energy was very high, and very good.'* Where the general group emotion was elevated, it helped to defuse isolated negativity among members:

The energy in the room, the positivity, the sort of being away from the University, the energy, the potential synergy of working in different teams, and meeting other small teams as well . . . There were some moans and gripes from team members at times, but on the whole the positivity of the experience stands out. H22

According to Randall Collins, it is 'emotional energy' (EE) that individuals seek from interaction rituals and that determines the 'success' or 'failure' of a ritual (Collins, 2004, p4). Facilitators on larger LDP events, for instance residential events, used a mixture of enthusiasm, diplomacy and positive reinforcement to promote this sense of collective emotion. One participant explained how being part of a dynamic event had made them feel as if they were *'contributing to something wider, bigger than my course . . . I don't know if that makes any sense.'* Facilitators using different symbols and rituals to mark or even celebrate the different phases of participants' rite of

passage through an event could further reinforce these feelings:

We had a big celebratory start and it will be good to have an ending to that in way or maybe that will come later, perhaps there might be thank you and 'didn't you do well,' and a sort of celebratory event. H22

5.7.1 Negative energy

Group 'emotional energy' can also go in a less harmonious direction (Boyns and Luery, 2015). Participants also spoke about the emotional tensions they experienced or witnessed during LDPs, and described how the behaviour or opinions of one or two people had a negative effect on the general 'group mood' (Barsade, 2002); *'We had a couple of very, very unhappy people in our group who were trying to turn the conversation their way . . . it was so hard to turn them round.'* Clashes of personality or opinion also affected relationships between some individuals, and, in the case of one participant, led to schism within their team. In a group where there were a lot of dominant personalities it could be; *'a case of who spoke louder,'* however most groups or teams seemed to work through these personality differences with time. Having to work with people with whom one did not necessarily 'hit it off' could also be, according to another participant, a useful lesson in diplomacy; *'because, you know, some of the people that we all coach wouldn't necessarily be people that we would choose to, to work with.'* Disputes or disagreements between members of a group can be annoying, but unwelcome comments directed at one personally can have a greater emotional impact. As one participant explained from their personal experience, feeling judged or criticised by a peer could be pretty hurtful:

I was just talking about an experience I had, I can't even remember what it was even if I'm honest. But one of the people... gave their feedback in really quite a rude way, or it came over as rude. And I was quite hurt by that actually . . . She was really criticising me, not helping me. E1

Participants in the present study generally appeared to be able to resolve emotional discord between each other, if only by choosing to ignore the other party. A couple of participants, however, expressed their sense of shock over the management of certain emotional situations by facilitators, such as when a participant was asked to leave when they were crying. The fallout from emotion-laden scenarios could spread to others through the group emotional cascade effect (Koman *et al.*, 2012) and in some cases this led on to gossip or ‘back of stage talk’ (Glushko and Tabas, 2008; Goffman, 1959) as members of the group attempted to disentangle a particular morally and emotionally jumbled effect; *‘The girl next to me just turned to me and she said, “Did she really just say that?” And you know we were all astounded that someone who is leading the course was so insensitive.’* In the case above, the emotional effects did not seem to have been successfully resolved through facilitator intervention, and had remained an issue of moral contention for the participant interviewed.

5.8 Experiential Learning

Adult learners already have their own set of knowledge, skills and values, and experience-based learning techniques are designed to make good use of existing skills and facilitate reflective learning, which can be applied within the real world (Kolb and Kolb, 2005; Wilkie and Burns, 2003). Participants themselves recognised the soft skills they were acquiring as highly transferable; *‘it’s a new string to my bow, and . . . I can tie that in with other things that I’m quite interested in.’* As self-development tools, reflection and reflexivity are closely associated with experiential and action based learning techniques (Mezirow, 1996; Pedlar, 1997). A significant feature of LDPs is the provision of ample opportunities for participants to engage in self-reflection and reflexive performances. The scene setting on LDPs, with people interacting together in a relatively open and relaxed environment would appear to aid this reflexive process. One participant spoke about how helpful it had been to *‘be an environment where you’re allowed to focus on things . . . and have the time and space to explore them.’* On the coaching programme, participants were encouraged to practice and reflect upon their active listening skills, which include such pre-requisites

as self-awareness, concentration on the speaker's words, intonation and body language, and the conveying of one's focused interest to the speaker (Grant, 2007). One participant recalled how a particular role-playing exercise, which involved listening with their eyes closed, had been, for them, a pivotal learning experience; *'You think you are listening to the coachee, but that particular exercise it made you more aware of the different types of listening and communication . . . that kind of thing you miss.'* Another challenge on the coaching programme was multitasking, with participants having to reflexively engage the other party, whilst bearing in mind that their awareness of competences and weaknesses would be subsequently written up as reflections for assessment by and feedback from the tutors:

You know, it's interesting because a lot of the learning pressure is on us . . . to deliver the coaching and at the same time we had to reflect on our performance and be able to take that back and ask intelligent questions, or question things that were unclear to us. E14

When participants engaged in close interpersonal work, it could make them feel vulnerable or exposed. The role of the facilitator in guiding action learning and wider group sessions was then very important as the *'evoking of some strong emotions,'* might require intervention on their part. Speaking about the emotional and embodied nature of socio-drama, a facilitator described it as a *'powerful experience'*; *'You're trying to engage people's . . . body and emotions in . . . what you're doing in terms of the learning process. So that does bring up, can bring up painful things . . . and I think there are ethical issues.'*

A participant in an action learning session recalled feeling very uneasy when they felt that they were being questioned too closely; *"I was the one in the middle . . . It is true that it appeared that I was in control, but I found some questioning too personal . . . it really affected me.* On the other hand, working through challenging scenarios in a relatively safe learning environment could be very good practice for the real world:

A couple of days after (the course), I was facing a whole load of students . . . I was facing a really difficult situation, and so I used the little techniques they gave, and it helped. So in terms of that . . . it was really useful for me because it helped me deal with stress on the day. K25

5.8.1 Realisations and insights

Personal realisations can happen gradually or as a result of a particular incident (Kitchenham, 2008; Dirkx, 2006). One participant described the moment when they realised their values did not tally with their present work role as like a ‘lightning bolt.’ Others felt that what they had gained from their time on an LDP was more reinforcement of existing self-knowledge, rather than learning anything ‘new and revolutionary’; *‘I think it kind of reinforced what I knew already about my management style.’* Several participants spoke about how they had grown in self-confidence and self-esteem as a result of their experiences on a programme; *‘I think it’s just give me is a bit of confidence to say . . . that I can do something outside the course . . . and that maybe I need to stick up a bit more for myself.’* One participant who had been invited by the programme organisers to be role model admitted that they had *‘gone in there feeling a bit of a fraud, you know the imposter syndrome. But (I) came away feeling quite proud of myself.’* Another felt that it had given them a new sense of maturity; *‘I don’t have to have somebody else telling me that I need to do it this way. You know I’m quite grown up I can make those decisions for myself.’* This sense of self-efficacy could lead participants to re-examine their work relationships or a role they had ‘accepted’ within the organisation; *‘the course helped me realise, “do you know what? You’re being taken for a ride here.” . . . So to a certain extent, they paid money to send me on a course to realise that they’re getting more out of me than they should be.’* While the above self-realizations could lead to individual change, collective emotional experiences also had lasting effects. The creative, sharing environment of the social world, and the soft skills used within them, evoked in the following participant a broader vision of what was achievable within

and beyond the organisation; *‘these soft skills and the resources might help us to challenge the system, and create a new system which might service us all better as humanity.’*

Chapter 6: Discussion

In this discussion, I closely examine the main points arising from my ethnographic data. In section 6.1, I give a brief overview of my findings, and in 6.2, I present my personal interpretation of the structure and function of LDPs as social worlds. I draw on sociological (Goffman, 1959; Collins, 2004) and anthropological (Turner, 1969, Turner, 2012) concepts of ritual and performance to consider what I see as the general structure and functions of social interaction ‘rituals’ within the LDP social world. I consider my own experience of liminality on entering the LDP social world, and the problems associated with self-disclosure in this ‘in-work-out-of-work’ world. In 6.3, I examine the performative elements of LDPs including the role of impression management within them. As Strauss explains, people get drawn into worlds for various reasons, and I consider peoples’ investments in LDPs, including in terms of commitment and work identity. All LDPs feature different types of activities and learning devices and in 6.4 the experiences and preferences of staff for particular types of activity are discussed, with a connection proposed between confidentiality issues and self-care. In 6.5, I consider the role of group activities and relationships in relation to LDPs, and conflict and leadership in groups. In 6.6, I explore the place of emotion and my own and others’ experiences of LDPs in relation to theories of emotional entrainment, embodiment and *communitas*. LDPs serve powerful and complex organisational, societal and political governance agendas, and in sections 6.7 and 6.8 I widen my analytical lens to consider stakeholder interest in staff development, and the influence of neoliberalism on governance, self-care and authenticity. Finally, in 6.9 I examine the concept of performance and consider how the combination of performance management and individual social performance issues might make LDPs an uncomfortable ground for some participants to navigate.

6.1 Summary of findings

As a means of studying culture within an educational organisation, the autoethnographic method is less time and resource consuming than traditional ethnography (Cunningham and Jones, 2005). At the same time it can allow for

insights into the culture in a more authentic way than conventional methodology might achieve. I used this method in this study to explore how staff including myself ‘feel their way’ through LDPs, the experiences they encounter and the part LDPs play in informing what may be an unpredictable career path. I discovered that as social worlds LDPs are a complex area of study, and that actors within these worlds arrive with different expectations and goals, interpret their time within these worlds diversely, and seek out different ways to cope with the pressures of contemporary life in an HE institution. The following themes emerged from my findings: hooks, prompts and incentives, activities on LDPs, performing, relationship building, energy and emotion and experiential learning. Data suggests that, for most participants, performing with others (such as in group presentations and role-play) was experienced as challenging but sometimes entertaining and confidence building, and that practicing interpersonal or ‘feeling’ skills helped participants to develop concrete and emotion-based competences that could be later applied in a ‘real world’ context. Differences emerged from the data between the personal and professional foci of staff, in particular between those working in corporate and academic sectors. At the same time, common feelings and experiences were discussed and observed among participants in emotion-laden areas such as bonding and trust building and performance anxieties. Significant moments and experiences were also reported by participants, some which had led to shifts in perception and behaviours. The relative informality and intimacy of these events made the crossing of the usual work boundaries easier, while the mixing of staff from different sectors was seen as generally a good thing. Then again, the presence of HR and other managerial staff on LDPs could engender, in some participants, feelings of wariness or even suspicion. Potential issues arising from the study data included time and work pressures during the academic year, the prioritising of research activities for academics, few opportunities for career progression and perceived irrelevance of a course or course materials. Corporate service staff expressed less emotional attachment to the organisation itself than academics and in general seemed more comfortable about viewing themselves as ‘entrepreneurial nomads.’ Academics, on the other hand (who

I have called ‘reluctant entrepreneurs’), were more ambiguous in their views on career progression. Some lived experiences were more mutual; participants from both sectors appreciated having time out for themselves, and generally enjoyed the social aspects of LDPs, however the time pressures and distractions on academics appeared to be greater, and prevented some of them from fully participating in the social breakout sessions. While some participants were relatively new to the world of learning and development, others from both the academic and corporate service sector had completed many courses, and these I have christened ‘course hoppers.’ I now go on the present and discuss my conception of the typical LDP social world.

6.2 LDPs as social worlds

Through their extensive development and application of social world theory, Strauss (1978) and Clarke (1991) identify features of social worlds as entities. These include; that social worlds are fluid and dynamic; that social worlds need to be studied in terms of their processes and activities; that actors in social worlds are more or less involved in the practices and ideologies of these worlds (Strauss, 1978, p123), and that social worlds have political dimensions, with areas of conflict including power issues such as allocation, access to and deprivation of resources (p125). Social worlds have ‘sub-worlds’ and intersect with other worlds. The ways people encounter, are introduced to, drawn into or get ‘hooked’ in social worlds can begin to explain phenomena such as mobility, commitment, and experiences of non-authenticity and marginalisation.

Data from my ethnographical fieldwork suggests that as social worlds LDPs possess their own distinctive attributes, ideologies, symbols and values, which are largely recognisable to those participating in them. While differences exist between LDPs, those I attended generally comprised some key elements, which distinguished them from everyday work or social activities. In the following figure, I have depicted what I see as the defining elements of the social world of the LDP. These are: a named event in a location (or setting) that is somewhat different or removed from the normal

workplace environment; the presence of participants and facilitators (the actors); a timetable, plan and rules, materials and props; and the use of an assortment of interactive and experiential learning activities. Together, I suggest these elements and devices define the general character of LDPs as social worlds. If overused however, such devices become tedious, thus designers and managers of LDPs (although borrowing from existing LDP models) must be prepared to reconfigure new symbols, props and activities to make their chosen programme attractive and interesting to themselves and to their audience. Participants congregate as actors in LDP social worlds, but come from different ‘sub worlds,’ which include different departments, work sectors and sometimes different institutions. Findings from my fieldwork confirmed a complex network of personal and interpersonal relationships established both during and outside of the programme schedule (‘on set’ and ‘back of stage’ (Goffman, 2012; Collins, 2004)). I propose that, along with a person’s alignment with the particular ethos and values of an LDP, it is these personal and interpersonal relationships, which provide the ‘glue’ that binds actors together. The following diagram illustrates the structure and social world of a typical LDP, as conceptualised for this study. Along with the location itself, various physical features (props and symbols distinguish LDPs from other workplace settings. While the event itself, and its scripted and unscripted activities define the event, the actors or ‘cast,’ who include participants, facilitators and occasional guests (role models, guest speakers etc.), and the relationships they form within and outside the LDPs embody and animate the social world. Missing from the diagram are wider socio-political worlds, whose presence must be therefore be assumed rather than viewed.

6.2.1 Diagram Key LDP

Diagram 3 Key:

Named event: Describes type of event e.g. coaching, leadership, socio drama

Environment/location: Classroom, boardroom, conference room, hotel etc.

Action plan/ structure: Start and finish time, planned activities, breaks

Props: Room Layout, chairs, AV system, flipcharts, pens, post it notes

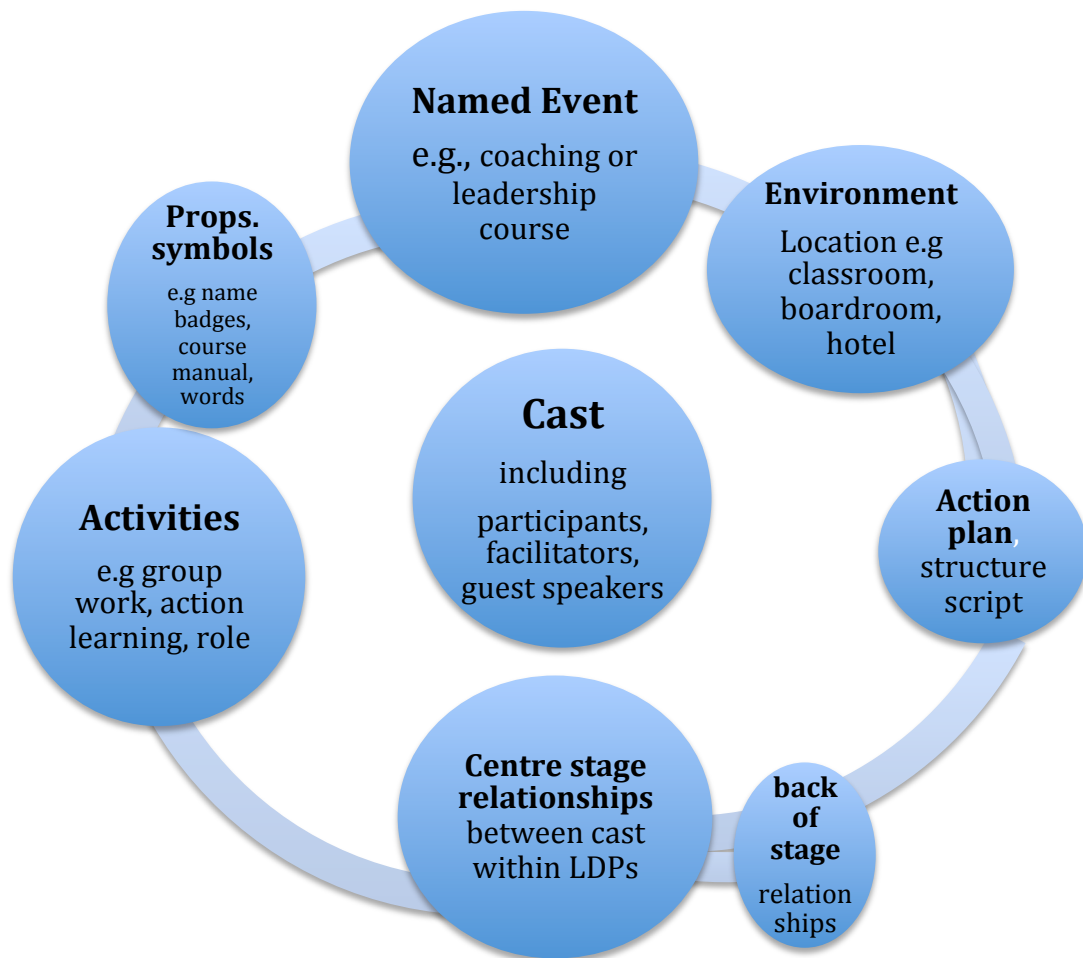
Symbols: Name of event, badges, course manual, buzz words and phrases

Cast: Participants, facilitators, guest speakers, auxiliary staff, students

Activities: Icebreakers, group work, role-play, action learning, videos, discussions

Relationships within the LDP: These are the key dramatic and emotional elements of LDPs. *Centre stage*- facilitator lectures, guests and role models, group presentations, student reps; *mid stage (not in diagram)*- group work action learning sets, collaborating building friendships; *'in the wings' (not in diagram)* - co-coaching, paired work; *back of stage relationships*: external to main LDP arena or activity, or informal aspects - email, gossiping, drinking together etc.

6.2.2 Diagram 3: Typical LDP structure and 'social world' (personal conception)



6.2.3 Discrete location

An attribute distinguishing LDPs from most other social worlds in and outside work is the deliberate merging of personal and professional domains. In order to achieve this successfully, most LDPs are held in discreet locations, away from the usual workplaces; *‘doing work related things, but where people aren’t knocking on the door or whatever.’* Their location, along with their confidentiality code (‘what’s said in the room stays in the room’) makes LDPs, as social worlds and learning spaces, relatively contained and status-less. I suggest that LDPs provide to a greater or lesser extent, a designated ‘safe space,’ in which actors can redefine themselves vis-à-vis the group and the wider social world.

There were limitations to the ‘safe space’ provided by LDPs however, some of which relate to participants’ difficulties in disengaging themselves from their daily work roles. Certain LDPs were held in closer proximity to the work environment than others, and ease of communication via technology meant that academics in particular admitted to re-engaging with the outside world, e.g. checking emails, and popping out for meetings straight after or even during LDPs; *‘we had a massive bid due and we were in critical negotiations with people, so we met people after the training course in the pub to thrash things out stuff like that.’* I also experienced this conflict and on at least one occasion left a programme to attend another scheduled meeting. This suggests that staff can feel torn between participating in the LDP and needing to fulfil everyday personal and/or work tasks, which may hinder full engagement.

While the relatively discreet and emotionally open nature of LDPs can engender a sense of trust and even communion there are limits to which actors are prepared to reveal themselves to others who were still relative strangers (Fixsen et al. 2015). LDPs feature a range of activities designed to encourage people to build trusting relationships between another such as icebreaking, problem based learning, role-play and other relationship building devices, but many rely on the establishment of swift trust between temporary groups (Meyerson, Weick, and Kramer 1996), which can be difficult to establish. Fellow participants are colleagues whom participants might well encounter in other roles and in different situations within the university, and this can lead to future embarrassment if too much ‘self’ is disclosed. Most LDPs espouse a positive approach to thinking and problem solving, and borrow from Appreciate Inquiry (Bushe, 2011), Emotional Intelligence (Goleman, 1996) and the other models, that promote the power of positivity (Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008). This emphasis on the ‘sunny side of life’ (Fineman, 2006) may discourage participants from exploring their darker side or from engaging in ‘negative’ discussion on the LDPs. Several participants including myself noted this tensions around negative disclosure of emotions on LDPs.

6.2.4 Trust issues

The issues of trust and suspicion also came through in my study of LDPs. Several participants expressed a general reticence about opening up too much to relative strangers, and some corporate service staff voiced concerns about the presence of managers and staff from HR on some programmes, saying that ‘even wall have ears in this place.’ In my own case, there were other reasons why I felt reluctant be open up in this only semi-private environment. I had recently returned to work following an extended period of illness and re-establishing my sense of personal safety and trust remained a work in progress. Seeing my professional self being made temporarily redundant had been painful and mildly humiliating, and left me on the alert for any seeming rebuff or vote of no confidence, even during role-play. In this fragile state, having to answer to my ‘boss’ for example in a role-play had seemed far too close to reality to feel comfortable. In addition, deeply rooted childhood feelings about rejection and belonging also surfaced for me, in particular when working in the same gender groups, echoing back to playground experiences in my all girls’ primary school. In retrospect, I regard these negative experiences as part of a ‘learning curve’ but they were none-the-less quite unsettling at the time.

6.3 Performance and LDPs

While much of social life can be described as ‘theatre like’ (Vosu, 2010), the social world of LDPs has a distinctive theatrical flavour, with its own stage ‘sets,’ ‘actors,’ ‘script’ and ‘props.’ Data from this study showed that participants on LDPs engage in individual and group ‘performances,’ which were judged by themselves and by other players on programmes. The professional context of these LDP performances made them specifically challenging, reflexive and memorable for the actors themselves. Participants, including experienced lecturers, vividly described their particular forms of performance nerves, excitement and so on, when front of stage, and the sense of achievement felt from successfully challenging personal comfort zones; *‘the fact that I actually did do all those things that I was terrified to do. Like stand up in front of*

those people.’ Participants also used theatrical metaphors and analogies (such as *‘their stage,’ ‘primadonna’*) to judge the performances of ‘role models’ and guest speakers.

Goffman (1959) points to the importance of being able to differentiate between the social rules required for different performances, which allows players to modify their performances according to their settings. The person as ‘actor’ engages in impression management, while on the other side the audience attempt to form an impression of the individual and their message (Jacobsen and Kristiansen, 2015, p69). As socially judged acts, people can ‘lose’ or ‘gain face’ during social performances. Most institutions have a ‘front of stage’ where people focus on the impression they make upon the public, and a ‘back of stage’ or back office where they can interact more freely (Goffman, 1967). For those performing front of stage, projecting the ‘right’ impression is important for gaining the attention and confidence of the audience, all the more so on courses about communication, assertiveness or leadership skills. In view of their assumed expertise, participants in this study judged the performances of facilitators and guest speakers by a different and more rigorous set of criteria, and discussed such performances ‘back of stage’ (Goffman, 1967).

As radical pedagogical tools, theatrical devices are deliberately used to facilitate personal growth and raising consciousness, and lead to behavioural change (Telesco, 2006a). While some people feel more comfortable with this type of ‘acting’ than others (Fixsen *et al.*, 2015), as explained in the previous section on emotion focused work, and as those of others who research the effects of role-play on players (Mitchison and Khanna, 2010) suggest, the acting out of ‘close to reality’ scenarios can bring up emotive issues which later need resolving (Fixsen *et al.*, 2015). Even trained actors can experience lasting emotional ‘fallout’ effects from certain performances (Blix, 2007). Discussions with facilitators indicated that some of them were aware of the potential effects of role-play, and the more personally focused LDPs (such as coaching) offered opportunities to disentangle these emotions (Fixsen *et al.*, 2015) such as in the form of debriefing sessions or individual tutorials. The

dramaturgical elements of LDPs can also be viewed as a covert form of organisational manipulation. Individuals on these types of soft skills courses are moved from their normal work environment and subjected to various persuasive techniques via emotive and charismatic social dramas aimed at changing participants' vision (Elmes and Costello, 1992). A clear example of this was the use of a highly emotive video about a para-sportsman, illustrating the idea that everyone is capable of 'realising their dreams,' and its impact on the audience.

6.3.1 Actors and their investment in social worlds

Strauss (1978) conceives of a social world as inhabited by actors who see themselves, and are perceived by others, as being more or less authentically of that world (p123). Programme facilitators and staff involved in the management of LDPs, as one might expect, had strong investments in both the wider ideology and practices behind particular types of learning and development and identified themselves as of that world; *'I'm very much into kind of experiential learning I suppose. And self-managed skills development.'* Participants on learning and development programmes come to LDPs from different sectors or social worlds, within and beyond the University. Different 'sub-worlds' of the social world under examination intersect one other (Clarke, 1991; Strauss, 1982) at various points. In this study, I did not set out to make obvious distinctions between different work roles and grade scales, however for analytical purposes it seemed expedient to distinguish between staff working and teaching within faculties who I have termed 'academics' (ACs), and those in support services, who I have called 'corporate service' (CS) staff. While these divisions are quite crude and general, interview data suggests that, overall, participants from these two sectors tended to see themselves as separate (e.g., *'I think there is sometimes this us and them atmosphere and mentality'*) and to identify themselves accordingly (e.g., *I'm not an academic so I didn't know about learning models*).

6.3.2 Commitment and identity

Differences emerged concerning the extent to which staff members were committed to particular career paths within the organisation. Findings suggest that the younger CS staff on short-term contracts considered their relationship with the organisation itself in more temporary and utilitarian terms (e.g., *'I'm a get in, get out (person), doing what I need to do'*). To distinguish this group of participants from others in terms of their attitude and mobility, I have called these staff 'career nomads.' Academics on the other hand, focused more on difficulties concerning career mobility, and one spoke of career progression within their university as 'absolutely dire.' Others expressed concerns about the managerial direction of HE; *'We need to bring the heart back into higher education . . . the push is towards more commodification of staff, resources, students, that's powerful and dominant now.'* Nevertheless these academics had taken advantage of opportunities to attend courses, such as relating to leadership, in case a promotional opportunity should present itself.

Due to their concerns about redundancy, some academics had taken the tactical decision to engage in more LDPs to *'sharpen my skills'* and had used networking opportunities both to listen to the experiences of other people working in HE, and to forge links to further career prospects. Some academics interviewed had chosen research related LDPs, but by no means all. However there appeared to be a general view among the academics that research was regarded as a greater priority than this type of soft skills development, with success in the sector still *'very much based upon doing research, publishing your papers and books, standing there as the authority in front of students.'* A certain amount of fatalism was expressed, albeit in muted terms, by academics concerning their need to become more entrepreneurial; *'You must market and promote yourself, that's the world we are in.'* These findings coincide with those of Clarke and Knight (2015) in which academics suspected they were sacrificing their 'academic integrity' by playing the careerism game, but nonetheless felt driven to do so, suggesting that academics perceive dilemmas concerning their identity management and 'careering' (p1869), and feel less supported in this process

than staff from corporate services. In view of their ambiguous feelings about self-entrepreneurism, and for the purpose of categorisation, which might be employed in other contexts, I have called these academics ‘reluctant entrepreneurs.’

Broadly speaking, both AC and CS staff in this study, considered their participation on the programme as a personal and professional investment, and most had seized the opportunity to focus on their professionalism and career path. A fair number of academics in this study had a business background, or held external consultancy roles, and these staff might therefore fall into the category of ‘career hybrids’ (Garoupa and Ginsburg, 2011). Some of these staff had taken the personal initiative and followed up entrepreneurial opportunities that came their way, refashioning themselves from full time lecturers into entrepreneurs, for example by working as external business or coaching consultants. Other academics had come from the commercial sector and transitioned into academia. This shifting back and forth pattern of career paths for university staff is a well-recognised phenomena, which has been written about in other contexts; for example, Whitchurch (2008) writes about the blurring of boundaries of work roles within HE, Floyd (2015) reflects on how HE department heads are required to assume a range of personal and professional identities and to regularly adopt and switch between them, while Lam (2011) considers how collaborative relationships between firms and universities have succeeded by building network career models between these two types of organisations. The designated categories of ‘career nomad,’ ‘course hopper’ and reluctant entrepreneur,’ that participants such as myself could be seen to embody, may prove useful as devices to be used in other contexts, including for those HEI stakeholders involved in commissioning, designing and evaluating programmes.

6.3.3 Liminality and identity

In this section, I explain how the ritual aspects of the LDP social world, and the symbols it employs, help to create for participants such as myself a distinct sense of entrance into a defined world, and a passage with a beginning, middle and completion

phase, and as such represent a rite of passage for candidates completing this process. As I expressed in the findings, when stepping across the threshold and into a new LDP I sensed this possibility and was both excited and apprehensive about it. Yes, being on the LDP held the promise of change, but in what direction? In a previous study of students transitioning from inchoate to professional I interpreted this journey in terms of a rite of passage (Fixsen and Ridge, 2012). Here, I consider the idea that the passage through an LDP may be seen as passage of symbolic significance to participants. Victor Turner (1969) proposes three universal stages to any rite of passage. The first phase, separation, comprises symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of individual group from an earlier fixed point and social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (state) or both. Entering the LDP social arena with its various props or artefacts (such as the signing in sheet and name badges) and symbolic behaviours (such as sitting in a semicircle, introductions, keeping confidentiality) can be said to signify the participant's temporary detachment from their day-to-day work duties, companions and activities. The seeming emotional openness (although in fact some types of feelings may be actively discouraged) also help to provide participants with space and time to reflect on themselves and their lives, and to express and share feelings in a way that might be difficult within their usual environments. These features of LDPs encourage participants, myself included, to shed their every day role identities, therefore allowing for new identities to form.

The third phase of the rite of passage is that of consolidation or aggregation. By virtue of this final phase, the liminal period is ended and incumbent assumes a more stable social position and a new role (Turner, 1969, p359). Designers and managers of LDPs appeared to appreciate the importance of celebrating completion, and most of the programmes I attended or observed finished with a performance from participants, in the form of rehearsed or impromptu presentation, followed by a short celebration. While this was not always associated with a formal change in role or status, most programmes 'awarded' participants with a certificate of attendance as an artefact to represent their successful passage through the course. In the case of the coaching

course participants such as myself who fulfilled all the programme's requirements were presented with their certificates at an award ceremony later in the year, signifying their successful completion of this professional rite of passage.

Life is a transitional state. Just as our physical bodies age, so our values, feelings, and commitment to place, group or role never remain at a fixed point. The student may become the teacher and the nomad may find a place to settle. An example of this within my own experience of LDPs was my transition from student coach to professional coach. The student phase was a betwixt and between state, during which both I, and my fellow cohort, were under tutorship, and thus not yet fully self responsible for ourselves as coaches. This had certain repercussions on our behaviour. As students we were more inclined to rule bending, for instance some people arrived late or left early, while a few failed to attend. Outside of class we engaged in back of stage chat; for instance we might moan about the assignments, or check on each other's progress in accumulating coaching practice hours. Our liminal position could be said to put us in a 'marginal' state where, under the 'authority' of the tutors, we were temporarily absolved of full responsibility. Once I had successfully completed the coaching course my attitude and behaviour altered. I was now in a position to take on coaching clients independently and this became the focus of my thinking and behaviour. Recently, some of us have returned to do the diploma, and I note the familiar faces - the course hoppers - among us. Are we, I ask myself, eternal students who can to be counted as life's 'passengers', constantly seeking a state of transition or liminality, during which full responsibility and commitment is not required?

6.4. Experiential Learning

During their time on LDPs, participants engaged in a range of experiential learning activities aimed at building skills and competences related to their personal and professional development. For the purpose of this study, and as a typology that might be applied to LDPs in other contexts, I have divided these activities into self-work comprising: self-care (e.g. mindfulness exercises, relaxation); entrepreneurship (e.g.

individual and group presentations, practising interview or assertiveness skills), self-examination (e.g. personality tests, journals, auditing, 360 reviews), and group work, comprising interpersonal work (such as coaching skills practice) and group exercises (e.g. ice breakers, discussions, role-play and other simulations, games and group presentations).

LDPs examined in this study encouraged not only formal learning but informal and incidental learning, such as can occur during informal discussions between participants during the breaks. As well as encouraging inter departmental collegial conversations, some of the LDPs examined in this study brought internal and external staff together to exchange ideas and practice, often in an informal way; *‘if you were interested you’d go along in that conversation and if you weren’t you would just wander off and join another conversation.’* This type of learning environment, which creates an atmosphere where dialogue can take place separately from general work routine, and where there are no apparent repercussions when people speak their own minds, has been associated with personal transformation and greater creativity (Fisher-Yoshida *et al.*, 2009). Because of their shared emphasis on self-governance these interventions can be considered to fall within Foucault’s definition of ‘techniques of self’ (Foucault, 1988a). In terms of preferred activities, a few differences emerged between AC and CS staff interviewed in this study. When asked which activities they had found most memorable or enjoyable, more academics commented on the value of action learning, wider discussions, creative activities and role-play, but complained about slow paced presentations, superficial use of theory and the overuse of Power-Point. Participants from corporate services, on the other hand, placed greater emphasis on more organised, tutor-led activities, contributions from guest speakers, while some found the ‘self examination’ elements of the programmes, such as the personality testing exercises (Coe, 1992; Pittenger, 2005) particularly revelatory; *‘some people think it’s no more than reading astrology in the papers . . . I actually felt it described what I believed about myself.’*

A number of participants from both sectors in this study had, over the years, taken part in a wide range of LDPs, especially of the self-care variety. Because of their propensity to go from programme to programme, and again, for typology purposes, I have called these people ‘course hoppers.’ The full reasons for staff going from course after course was not explored, but for some ‘hoppers’ it was associated with managing job stress in a more constructive way. One participant, when explaining why they had chosen to go on a self-compassion course, commented on how the push to ‘*succeed and stuff*’ had taken its toll on both their self-confidence and health; ‘*Because we want to do well . . . we tend to not treat ourselves well.*’ While participants largely accepted the need for self-improvement, perceptions concerning the means of achieving this goal were ambiguous. Participants in this study saw no particular problem in combining, for example, meditation with business goals, yet some noted moral and practical ambiguities in messages conveyed through LDPs concerning the entrepreneurial activities of successful role models (as portrayed in the literature or by actual role models) and their personal experience of work-life balance and wellbeing; ‘*showing what you can achieve if you don’t have a very good work life balance; I thought that was very incongruent with what the course was about.*’

6.4.1 Reflexive practice and emotion management

The term reflexivity has been much discussed in both the sociological (Archer, 2012, 2010; Giddens, 1991) and educational (Schon, 1983; Moon, 2004) literature; here I will refer to the role of reflexivity as a project of the self, which is nonetheless a feature of social interaction, and its use in LDPs. In the sense that reflection mediates both our actions and our life choices, reflexivity has always been a feature of human society (Holmes, 2010). However, with social structures now increasingly inadequate in preparing individuals for the intense flow of change affecting their lives, self-reflexivity has become virtually a moral imperative (Archer, 2012). Giddens (1991) describes how the breaking down of protective framework of traditional institutions in which identity was staked out and ritualised through rites of passage, has led to a new order in which the self has become a reflexive project that

must be ‘routinely created and sustained in the individual’ (p52). On many LDPs the ethos and practice of reflexivity on self is honoured and delineated as something to be taught and developed (Holmes, 2010), including through experiential learning (Malinen, 2000; Mezirow, 1991; Reeves, 2010). Data from this study (my own and others’ experiences) suggest that LDPs offer participants opportunities to reflect on existing competences in a positive way. As a facilitator explained, *‘One thing that I always try introduce in our training is think about those 5 key areas, what are you particular strengths?’* Unlike solitary self-reflective practices, on LDPs participants engaged in ‘reflexive performances,’ allowing them to practice and refine their soft skills collaboratively, *‘they learn a different way of communicating with other people that has a kind of payback for them.’*

All social worlds have their largely unspoken social etiquette and feeling rules (Hochschild, 1979; Goffman, 1963) which set the parameters for acceptable or preferred behaviours. In order to protect individuals and develop trust, feeling rules are often spelled out to participants on LDPs, for example showing respect for each other and maintaining confidentiality. On courses that feature intensive and prolonged interpersonal work, emotional management and feeling rules take on greater importance. Participants on LDPs such as coaching are encouraged to reflexively practice feeling rules (Hochschild, 1979) and refine ‘feeling skills,’ including managing of emotions (Thoits, 1996), and use deliberation and feedback to judge for themselves the types and levels of competencies achieved. As in other studies of emotional management by professionals who work closely with people (Crawley, 2004; Scott and Myers, 2005) participants in this study recognised the need to manage their emotions and (to a lesser extent) the emotions of those with whom they worked, in order to deliver a performance or engage in interpersonal transactions professionally and competently. Through engaging in different types of emotion focused work on LDPs, some participants felt that they had acquired a pool of emotional competences, which they could use in ‘real world’ professional contexts; *‘It’s a new string to my bow, and . . . I can tie that in with other things that I’m quite*

interested in.’ But practising emotion work, even within a relatively safe environment is not without its risks. Participants gave several examples of incidents which they felt had resulted in an ‘emotional jumble’ (Fixsen *et al.*, 2015), or when they felt a line had been crossed between openness and intrusion, e.g., *‘It is true that it appeared that I was in control, but I found some questioning too personal.’*

6.4.2 Transformation or self-affirmation?

Mezirow (1991) explains how the individual learner’s frames of reference can, within a challenging but supportive learning environment, be transformed, so that people think and behave in differently, and change their self-perception (Taylor, 2008; Dirkx *et al.*, 2006). This individualistic view of transformative learning has been critiqued for placing the individual adult learner at the centre of this process, rather than focusing on organisational transformation (Collard and Law, 1989; Levin and Greenwood, 2013), nevertheless personal change is central to the self-improvement ethos of most LDPs. Participants in this study did not use the term ‘transformation’ in reference to memorable experiences, however several referred to realisations or ‘*light bulb*’ moments, after which they viewed themselves, in a newer, stronger light; e.g. *‘it made me realise that I’ve got skills and experience that can be used in a different way.’* The following extract from my journal reflects my own thoughts concerning the transformative potential of LDPs:

A question that arises in my mind during the workshop today is whether or not these courses really encourage people to move outside their frame of reference, or continue to work more effectively from within it? In other words to what extent is the learning transformative in the sense that Mezirow uses this term? And how can I begin to capture this? Are the activities encouraging people or challenging them to work and think in a different way? And to what extent do they help develop a greater emotional intelligence? Some of the responses from the xx interviews suggest to me that participants select aspects of a course, which resonate with their existing value structure and working

practices, and use the course as a way of reinforcing their values working methods.

Whether or not one can consider an experience as ‘educational’ or ‘transformative’ depends on how one defines both learning and transformation, and there are multiple definitions of both. Overall, my study findings indicate that the perceptual shifts in participants resulting from their time on LDPs commonly concerned issues within the organisation, and their relationship with the others within in it (feeling taken for granted, being ready to move on etc.), rather than involving any alteration to core beliefs.

6.5 Group activities and relationships

The literature on affective learning tools in organisations has tended to focus on the development of emotional intelligence (EI), emotional competences and resilience at the individual level (Cherland, 2004; Gruicic and Benton, 2015). These concepts, while useful, fail to fully account for the development of emotional competences during the interactive and dynamic processes taking place within group learning situations. Group activities, such as on LDPs, has been reputed to promote emotional intelligence in individuals (Grant, 2007), and to act as vehicles for the building of group emotional competences (Wolff *et al.*, 2006). Participants on this study did not directly refer to group emotional competences, and such theories were not tested out in this study. On the other hand, a number of people spoke about group activities and projects in which outputs had been achieved such as the starting up of a new collaborative project, suggesting some type of group competency effect may have taken place. While most participants focused on personal change, some also saw LDPs as potential vehicles for community building and multidisciplinary collaboration; e.g. *‘the future issues we’re going to face need multidisciplinary multi hat thinking . . . by running courses like this- building a community- we have more diverse options.’*

6.5.1 Conflict

In terms of expanding one's social network, participants on cross-university programmes spoke of the considerable personal and professional advantages of meeting people from different sectors within and outside the organisation, and regarded this as one of the most productive and enjoyable aspects of LDPs; *'to build those friendships, that was very important.'* Nevertheless, as the Roman poet Lucretius stated, 'one man's meat is another man's poison.' As aspects of group behaviour (French and Simpson, 2010), conflict and competition are more likely to arise where there are personality and ideological differences between group and team members (Cai and Fink, 2002; Klein *et al.*, 2011), e.g. *'a bit of a clash of feeling during group work . . . (there was) a range of approaches that one would take. Not necessary that one was superior or was wrong . . . it would then be a case of who spoke louder.'* The consequences of mixing particular personality types can be hard to predict (George, 1990) but can have a significant influence on mood within a group, and on the learning experience (Kelly and Barsade, 2001; George, 1990). Relationships within groups are complex (Kelly and Barsade, 2001; Tajfel, 1974; Game, 2008; Klein *et al.*, 2011); members of a group or team can hold different values (Klein *et al.*, 2011; Glew, 2009), and in the present study these differences became more apparent when people were working closely with each other, such as when planning a formal presentation. For a few participants group personality clashes or negativity within their smaller groups on a particular LDP had proved sufficiently irritating or upsetting to colour their general feelings and opinions about the course; *'we had a couple of people who were just like his big wall of negativity. I hate my job here at x . . . was so hard to turn them round.'*

6.5.2 Group leadership

The influence of the facilitator or leader of the group has been the subject of extensive study (Klein *et al.*, 2011; Avolio *et al.*, 2009), with different theories used to describe the effects of different group facilitation and leadership styles (Côté *et al.*, 2010; Moxnes, 1999; Belbin, 2010). In Klein *et al.*'s study (2011) for instance, significant

differences were found between the effects of task-focused and person-focused leadership, the former lessening conflict between different personality types, and the latter exacerbating diversity-conflict. Participants in the present study reported many positive effects of facilitation, including finding facilitators friendly and helpful. There were also complaints from participants about particular facilitator leadership styles, such as failing to curtail an active learning exercise that was becoming too personal, not allowing enough time for group discussions, or exercising what some participants thought was unnecessary emotional control over the group. Academics in the study expressed more criticism about what they saw as over use of facilitation, while some corporate service staff expressed reluctance to work with facilitators who they might encounter in other work situations; *'If it were up to me, you wouldn't have people who are line managed in the same sessions as their managers.'* There was no evidence in this present study that disagreeing with a facilitator's leadership style had a negative effect on bonding between members of the group; indeed the more dramatic or contentious issues were sources of discussion and gossip 'back of stage' (Michelson *et al.*, 2010; Kurland and Pelled, 2000).

6.6 Emotion and groups

The social world of the LDP is a dynamic fluid place, with various interaction rituals taking place within them deliberately generating collective emotional responses in the actors. Each LDP had its own set of team building devices designed to encourage physical and moral cohesion between group members, e.g. *'an opportunity to cross fertilise ideas, and having a bit of a team bonding.'* On the courses I attended, programme planners and facilitators employed various strategies to encourage positive affect (Hicks *et al.*, 2010), and emotional entrainment (von Scheve *et al.*, 2014), and participants referred to scenarios in which this had been successful; *'I was very struck by how willing everyone was to try and make something happen, I guess that positive vibe isn't something that you always get.'* The fact that staff on many LDPs were enrolled along the lines of particular personal and professional characteristics such as gender, work sector (academic/ corporate sector), status (e.g.

management), area of expertise/ interest (e.g. research) in itself could have helped to reinforce feelings of emotional solidarity; e.g. *'we were all men together.'*

Entrainment mostly takes place below the threshold of consciousness, indicating that people literally 'feel their way' through intense ritual interactions (Allen, 2012, p124). One of the things that encourages entrainment during interaction rituals is turn-taking, such as people speaking one at a time (Levitan and Hirschberg, 2015). The speed at which this happens is vital to the process of entrainment, and the faster the alternation the more entrained the group becomes (Allen, 2013). Emotional entrainment can also be created in larger groups, through the use of shared purpose and symbols (von Scheve *et al.*, 2014). Participants spoke lyrically about the *'positive vibe'* they had experienced from being physically present at a large residential event for academics; *'just the intensity, the amount of work that we got done in that amount of time, the energy, the synergy.'* The longer-term effects of this type of engagement were not examined in interviews, however my participant observation on a follow up event some months later suggested that this sense of community had waned, that the atmosphere was more critical and that due to workload conflicts some individuals had withdrawn from the original group altogether.

6.6.1 Emotion-based competences

If we accept that one of the aims of LDPs is to develop emotional competences involving the skilled negotiation of different social interaction rituals, the following criteria would probably need to be met if participants are to judge them as 'successful.' First, participants should feel sufficiently safe and comfortable about detaching themselves from their usual role and work identity and assuming a new one. Second, participants should feel sufficiently motivated and engaged to invest emotional energy in the ritual and third, members should be sufficiently flexible and cooperative in their attitudes and behaviour to overcome the usual obstacles to communication in groups, such as personality clashes and differences in approach. Where this is the case, individual emotional competences can, in theory, coalesce and group emotional

competency (GEC) (Koman *et al.*, 2012) can be utilised for useful effect, such as group members working collaboratively on and producing a well designed group presentation or project proposal. Findings of the present study suggest that those LDPs that allow ample time for group discussion, are mindful of separating managers from their staff, offer maximum privacy and safety to encourage self exploration and creativity and where the purpose of activities are explained, are more likely to give rise to ‘successful’ interaction rituals (Collins, 2004). Conversely, activities taking place in cramped or noisy venues, with overlong or slow presentations or over-reliance on power point, activities which seem arbitrary or whose purpose is unclear, or with excessive intervention from facilitators are more likely, in emotional energy terms, to ‘fail’ as interaction rituals (Collins, 2004). The above criteria rest on the designing and execution of a learning programme that recognises and encourages the ‘emotional entrainment’ between participants in the LDP social world.

Some of the LDPs I investigated centred on departmental or organisational level activities, such as Away Days and various change initiatives. As social worlds these were sometimes on a large scale, but generally included icebreaking, team building and motivational exercises. When more people are gathered together, the potential for both positive and negative emotional energy (EE) and entrainment is greater (Collins, 2004, 2013). For example, feelings of solidarity or resistance can arise at university events promoting or explaining organisational change. As agents of change, managers are required to understand and work with the uncertainty and anxiety of transition, and to, as it were, manage the ‘darker side’ of emotionally charged situations (Boyns and Luery, 2015). At one large cross-university event I attended, I noted how the organisers employed various strategies to manage staff anxiety and ‘win people over’ to a not wholly popular change agenda. Tactics included bringing in ‘experts’ from outside the organisation to explain the benefits of changes, behaving in a light hearted manner to create the impression that everybody was ‘in the same boat,’ and boosting morale by portraying the organisation as forward thinking and entrepreneurial. The mingling of managers with participants ‘on the ground’ also helped to mitigate against

the impression of there being an ‘us and them’ and discouraged ‘back of stage’ (Goffman, 1959; Glushko and Tabas, 2008; Michelson *et al.*, 2010) gossip from being directed at management personally. The social worlds of LDPs are infused with various corporate messages. For example, a repeated message on the coaching and mentoring programme I attended was that everyone in the organisation could be an agent for change, and that, starting at ‘grass roots’ level, this could become an accumulative process for positive change within the workplace. We were encouraged to use the self reflection and coaching models such as the GROW model (MindTools, 2015; Grant, 2012) to encourage positivity and motivation in ourselves and others, and to build a coaching culture within the organisation.

6.6.2 Interpersonal and embodied engagement

With increasing emphasis on budget cutting, and innovations in online learning, the justifications for providing such a wide variety of face-to-face courses (which are relatively costly in terms of human resources) for staff may be called into question.

In this section, I explain why face-to-face, embodied experience continues to be of importance for adult learners, including in the workplace. Heralded as a ‘global village,’ (McLuhan and Powers, 1989), internet communication offers a partial solution to social isolation (Hinton *et al.*, 2010; Hampton *et al.*, 2009), and has contributed to lower levels of depression and poor self confidence in users in some studies (Shaw and Gant, 2002). Digital learning in one’s own chosen space and at one’s preferred pace is an important and valued aspect of contemporary adult learning programmes (Linda, 2000; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Dutilleul *et al.*, 2011; Wellman *et al.*, 2001; Villar and Alegre, 2007; Bailey and Barley, 2011), and in this study participants including myself appreciated the addition of online learning resources. Even so, there are sound health and wellbeing reasons for maintaining or even increasing, the embodied elements of staff (and student) learning and development. Our digitalised workplace is characterised by a notable reduction in embodied interaction, or even oral communication, which has contributed to the increasing disconnectedness between ourselves and others, within our immediate surroundings

(Taylor, 1991). Nowadays it is entirely possible to spend one's entire day in a large open plan office, staring at a computer screen, without so much as a glance at, or word exchanged with other work colleagues.

The concept of embodied engagement concerns participation of the entire self in an activity, including in understanding and meaning making (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Research into embodied engagement suggests that virtual communication and forms of artificial intelligence may not adequately replace the meaningful encounters that employees seek in the workplace (Ray, 2006; Reeve *et al.*, 2010; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Embodiment, in the sense of body awareness and management, is increasingly recognised as a key component of wellbeing (Lomas *et al.*, 2016b). Face-to face LDPs are opportunities to engage in an embodied way in workplace related activities; *'the space to kind of connect with others and be supported by people . . . was incredibly valuable.'* Many motivations and benefits of LDPs identified by study participants (such as building relationship and performing with others) revolved around physical attendance, with the establishment of trust, building of collegiate relationships and practising reflexive performances largely taking place via face-to-face interaction rituals, e.g., *'I felt there was quite a large element of trust, quite early on, which I felt was probably fairly unusual.'* The effects of embodied engagement extend beyond the individual; being in close proximity with others had led to participants feeling as if they were part of *'something bigger, or a 'wider community'* which could feel inspiring. Returning to Victor Turner's ideas on *communitas* as a social communion (1969), and Edith Turner's description of *communitas* as the groups pleasure in sharing experience (2012, p2), it could be said that during liminal moments people happily rid themselves of status differentiations and thereby become truly human. These experiences also resemble what Charmaz (1991) calls the *'intense present,'* in which people feel *'a sense of passion, authenticity, and involvement'* in the lived activity (p. 245). Such exhibitions of collective feeling are uncommon in modern work environments, where siloism and individualistic behaviour prevails. I suggest that what the concepts of collective effervescence, *communitas* and emotional energy

all attempt to linguistically convey is a sense of ‘otherness’ that ensues when people temporarily lose the separateness that egocentricism creates. At such moments, something greater than the sum of its parts occurs, a wholeness that is created through sharing collective feeling. However, by focusing on the individual and using self-consciousness as a tool to encourage competitive consumerism, the neoliberal version of capitalism evident all around us, (including in workplace) mitigates against collective feeling and action. In place of collectivism, a ‘what’s in it for me’ philosophy now prevails, which is likely to include people’s attitudes to personal and professional development.

At the same time, people retain a memory of collective feeling and seek out the ‘golden glow’ that spontaneously arises during successful interaction rituals. I propose that the ritualistic elements and artefacts of the LDP social world (such as introductions/ice-breakers, role-play, presentations, certificates) help to create for participants a sense of passage with a beginning, middle and completion phase, which when contrasted with the unending state of liminality associated with much of modern life, may help explain their appeal staff, including those on short term contracts who may hold a marginal position in an organisation. As much as the conveying of information or sharing of expertise with other adult learners (Hutchinson, 2003), the successful adult learning and development ecology hinges on providing a safe and nurturing climate for learning, and a sense of community between its members. HRM managers are aware of the importance of sense of community, and provide a range of ‘bonding’ activities such as sports events, walking groups, and knitting circles for staff. On the other hand, these activities require fitting into an already busy work schedule, which for academics increasingly includes student lunchtime tutorials and other meetings. By re-configuring the work environment and the HE work time-table itself, for instance by providing break out spaces for all staff, and beginning the week with a regular ‘catch up’ meetings, people could feel a greater sense of *communitas* which might be reduce problems such as isolation associated with the neoliberal workplace. All this supposes a cultural shift within the HE workplace, which as I

argue later, may be best brought about through transformative action research within HE organisations (Greenwood and Levin, 2001; Levin and Greenwood, 2013).

6.7. Stakeholder interest

Up to this point in my discussion I have considered LDPs largely from the interaction perspective of staff participating in them. Here, I examine soft skills development from the standpoint of wider stakeholder interest these programmes, focusing on three performance management interventions which featured on the LDPs examined in this study: 360 degree feedback, coaching and leadership skills. With the need to train managers becoming more pressing, there is now considerable market pressures on modern organisations, including universities, to ‘buy into’ soft skills learning and development programmes (Ngang *et al.*, 2013; Hannon, 2008; Holland and Pyman, 2006), facilitated by either external trainers, internal staff or a mixture of both. HRM and academic departments are tasked with providing staff, and in particular middle and senior management staff, with the right programmes and tools for developing effective personal and interpersonal skills, within the limitations of their budgets. As a means of getting feedback from a wide range of line managers and co-workers the 360-degree feedback process has gained huge popularity in the corporate world (Ghorpade, 2000) and on some LDP courses for staff at middle and senior management level was a central element to the programme. An advantage of this process is that it is more wide reaching than feedback from a line manager alone, however there are problems with this method including issues of time, validity, privacy and effectiveness (Ghorpade, 2000). Most participants in the present study taking part in a 360-degree process (all of whom worked in corporate services) had found this useful but reported that it was rather a drawn out exercise involving obtaining feedback from a number of people, and this had held some participants back from completing other aspects of their programme. Another assumption underpinning adoption of 360-degree feedback is that it heightens an individual's self-awareness by highlighting differences and dissimilarities between the way in which participants see themselves and how others see them, This was not, however, borne out in a civil

service study, where the process failed to develop the anticipated level of self awareness, nor was it fully aligned with other development plans, or the organisation's core competences (Morgan *et al.*, 2005). In addition, the successfully use of 360-degree feedback for both employee development and performance appraisal arguably requires a clear understanding of, and correspondence between, the objectives and possible outcomes on the part of participant and managers, which in practice may not always be the case. Despite the above limitations, one HRM manager indicated that the use of 360-degree feedback was likely to be extended to lower ranking staff and academics across the University, adding another layer of performance evaluation to existing processes such as the PPDR.

6.7.1 Coaching

Another intervention closely related to personal and organisational performance management is coaching. Unlike counseling or most other talking interventions, coaching practices have a defined hierarchy, with executive (top level) coaching having emerged as a popular, and expensive, tool for developing and supporting senior level staff (Feldman, 2005; Bono *et al.*, 2009). As a management tool, coaching has become very popular and, although evaluative research on coaching is still embryonic, data from meta-analyses studies suggest coaching to have some efficacy in organisational contexts (Theeboom *et al.*, 2014; Mortimer, 2011). A growing body of academic literature is also exploring the nature and potential benefits of coaching in HE (Passmore, 2006; Hackman and Wageman, 2005). Studies suggest that coaching and similar interventions help people to enhance sense making (Toit, 2007), rein in emotional impulses, handle relationships and conflict more smoothly and reduce workplace stress (Ladegard, 2011). On the other hand, having a coach does not guarantee that the coaching relationship will be productive or open; in some instances coaching could make a problematic situation worse (Berglas, 2002). One reason given for the success or failure of some coaching relationships concerns the 'coachability' of some individuals (Theeboom *et al.*, 2014). Like many features of coaching, this term emerged from the sports world, and describes the combination of personality

traits (e.g. agreeableness, openness to experience) and motivational components (e.g. achievement motivation) required to enhance performance and functioning (Giacobbi and Weinberg, 2000; Theeboom *et al.*, 2014). Even if individuals are motivated to engage in coaching, the coach's style or skills level may prevent the coaching session from being productive. In Solansky's study (2010), participants opened up more when the mentor allocated to them focused more on communicating with them and less on making sure that the participant was being compliant with the programme (p679). In the present study, one participant who was allocated a coach as part of their leadership course found the experience uncomfortable and unproductive, because there seemed to be little to say and they felt that the coach had little to offer in terms of suggestions for how they might progress in their career; *'I walked out feeling I just wasted my time.'* This reinforces the need for coaches to be well trained and supervised, for the coach and coachee to be carefully matched, and for the coachee to be given sufficient information and realistic expectations of the coaching process.

6.7.2 Leadership

The University's staff learning and development programme includes a number of soft skill courses focused on leadership skills. Among the various arguments supporting HE investment in leadership and management skills is the assertion that, although leadership has always been challenging, organisations now face unique stressors, and this justifies a greater focus on what constitutes effective and genuine leadership (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). For decades the focus on leadership and management has been on hard or technical skills (Ngang *et al.*, 2013), however modern or 'smart leaders' (Rao, 2013) are now expected to possess a blend of both hard and soft skills, both of which could be developed and refined through learning and training (Rao, 2013; Solansky, 2010). Important for HR staff development planning is that soft skills are thoroughly linked with performance across work sectors (Ngang *et al.*, 2013). All this supposes the necessity and desirability of 'designer leadership' (Gronn, 2003) models and the assumption that the prioritising of leadership skills (Gillies, 2012) will create a more profitable and efficient organisation.

However, from a socio-political perspective, discourses presenting leadership as vehicles for organisational change need to be carefully examined. The emphasis on 'leadership' can be viewed as hierarchical and divisive (Gillies, 2012), failing to address the prevailing myth of exceptionality and shirking the potential redundancy of the leadership concept in the face of alternative, more democratic, distributions of power (Gronn, 2003). Whilst the focus remains on top down managerial practises, opportunities to consider alternative models of power distribution (Gronn, 2003), such as holistic systems approaches to organisational change in HE (Flood, 2010; Greenwood and Levin, 2001) may be overlooked or dismissed.

6.8. Wider issues: Governance and change in HE

Governance can refer to the institutional arrangements that governments use to govern society and to exercise collective control and influence over the societies for which they have been given responsibility (Massan, 2003), or it may refer to the control of the possible *field of action* of others. Until relatively recently, organisational governance in universities remained partially cushioned from the full effects of free market competition (Bleiklie and Kogan, 2007), but since the Cameron government reduced universities' public funding the situation has become one of charging what the market (i.e. students) are prepared to pay (Dearden *et al.*, 2011; Turner *et al.*, 2000). The 2011 White Paper, 'Higher education: Students at the heart of the system' (Business Innovation and Skills, 2011) called for 'radical reform,' in particular shifting public money away from grants to repayable loans, improving student experience and taking responsibility for increased social mobility. To what extent universities can ever be fully economic markets is debatable; no research university is yet driven by shareholders, profit, market share and so on (Marginson, 2013). Nevertheless, the way that universities and other institutions of higher education have defined themselves as stakeholders (Olssen and Peters, 2005), and the roles of staff in HE, has fundamentally changed. In this section I will discuss two major shifts of governance within modern universities; the redistribution of staff resources towards

leadership and management and corporate services; and self-governance and ‘self-care’ in its traditional and contemporary sense.

Within universities in the UK and abroad, HE institutions have been the subjects of exponential growth of administrative work (and posts) and quality assurance measures (Levin and Greenwood, 2013). A profound transformation has reconfigured universities’ governance and management, and the roles of academics (Parker, 2011), while the role and status of corporate staff has significantly increased, as has the importance of corporate branding (Knight, 2012; Blass, 2005). This in turn has led to an escalation in managerial practices and growth of corporate service sector within higher education (Massan, 2003; Kolsaker, 2008; Giroux, 2002; Berg *et al.*, 2016). Across universities world wide, the ratio of, and relationship between, academic and professional staff has radically altered (Graham, 2012; Whitchurch, 2008). In the US, since 1987, non-academic outnumber faculty staff two-to-one, with individual departments devoted to marketing, disability, recruitment, fund-raising and so on (Marcus, 2014). Data from the UK’s Higher Education Statistics Agency, up to 2014-15, also indicates that non-academic staff in UK HE institutions (HEIs) exceeded academic staff in that year (HESA, 2016). This growth in HE administration has been linked to many factors, including government demands for information, an increasingly complicated regulatory environment and internal demands for accountability and role adaptation. While it is easy to paint an idealistic picture of an academia of the past, few would disagree that HE has become more management driven, and increasingly subject to corporate models of accountability and quality assurance (Levin and Greenwood, 2013).

6.8.1 Para-academics

To cater for these changes within academia, a new genre of professional support staff, known as ‘para-academics,’ (such as teaching and learning coordinators, research management staff) has emerged (Macfarlane, 2011), who require a more managerial skills-set than ordinary academics. Qualitative studies of administrative staff

experiences in HE (Graham, 2012; Szekeres, 2006; Whitchurch, 2008) suggest that these staff too are reconfiguring these roles within a corporate university. External audit, backed by resource allocation decisions, represents a significant shift in power relations between the state, universities and academic staff, with universities now expected to deliver against government targets (Kolsaker, 2008). Annual review processes, league tables and rankings, impact narratives, performance-related pay, the granting of degree-awarding powers to commercial providers, off-shore campuses, student fees, expanding overseas recruitment, and Public-Private Partnerships, are further examples of governance practices within the corporate university (Ball, 2015).

The growth of non-discipline specific personal and professional programmes for staff and managers working in HE can be seen as both consequence and remedy for neoliberal practises. Implementing any change is not easy, but in universities with their many stakeholders and competing ideologies and concerns this task has been particularly challenging (Knight, 2012, p11). To reconfigure these changes in work divisions, skills and attitudes, the role of HR departments in supporting, training, motivating and emotionally engaging HE staff has grown significantly, both in extent and importance (Knight, 2011).

While the pressures of escalating social and cultural change can be universally stressful, some authorities have questioned whether the change of role for academics within universities is really as problematic as the critics of neoliberal policy (Dilts, 2011; Olssen and Peters, 2005) suggest. Reporting on her findings concerning academic professionalism in managerialist times, Kolsaker (2008) concludes that academic managers are not feeling as defeated or 'de-professionalised' as much of the literature portrays (Winter, 2009; Birnbaum, 2003; Ball, 2015), rather they exploit strategies of power to manage and reconstitute their self-concept within an evolutionary context, as is healthy and necessary in the modern, knowledge-based economy. Other studies argue that this reconfiguration of role and identity has, for academics at least, been forced upon them by an ever-proliferating array of

governmental technologies of power, directing those who do academic work to pursue goals that are rewarded through performance management measures and metrics (Kallio *et al.*, 2015). As governments and other regulatory bodies impose accountability regimes upon all areas of HE (Levin and Greenwood, 2013), so academics, in an attempt to moderate the pressures of excessive managerial competitive demands, have become engaged in an individualistic ‘careering’ strategy (Clarke and Knights, 2015, p1865), which precludes any sustained and honest self reflection. One study of HE heads of departments found that while some of them (the ‘jugglers’) were able to successfully manage multiple identities, others were merely coping, while the remainder felt unduly challenged and were considering new careers (Floyd and Dimmock, 2011).

6.8.2 Neoliberalism and self-governance

Self-governance refers to the capacity of social entities to govern themselves autonomously and as such is an important mode of societal governance in modern society (Kooiman and van Vliet, 2000). In order to compete within a global HE market, universities have had to devise ways to equip their staff with managerial and leadership skills and support mechanisms to act as effective employees, managers and leaders (Floyd, 2015) including through encouraging them to participate in ever more forms of self work or ‘activities of the self.’ Borrowing from Foucault’s thesis on neoliberal governmentality and government of self (Foucault, 2008b), these pursuits can be seen as part of a new and expanding emphasis on self-governance and self-betterment within the modern workplace. Managerial requirements such as personal and professional development (PPD) plans, when considered alongside the erosion of the employment obligations of universities towards staff, has now rendered self-governance a matter of necessity rather than a personal choice for most employees. At the same time, the promotion on self-care and self-development in the workplace throws out powerful moral messages to staff that they should be drawing from their own inner lives. Self-governance arguably places too much responsibility on the individual for their own betterment (Honneth, 2004; Cederström, 2011; Kelly *et al.*,

2007), diverts attention away from wider issues of inequality, power and social manipulation (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005; Peters, 2001) and encourages unrealistic personal goals which can create disappointment and anxiety (Kelly *et al.*, 2007). Over time, this emphasis on self responsibility can leave the individual feeling anxious and empty (Honneth, 2004). Another dangerous corollary to this is that low self-esteem and low engagement (as opposites to self-assertiveness and high engagement) become associated with a host of personal and social ills (Ecclestone, 2007; Ecclestone and Hayes, 2008) and that a lack of personal and interpersonal skills, such as emotional intelligence, comes to be equated with personal and social deficiencies (Fineman, 2008). Warning of the dangers of what she terms ‘institutionalised therapeutics,’ Ecclestone (2007) regards ‘slippery concepts’ such as emotional intelligence and assertiveness as being part of this collection of new explanations about appropriate feelings and responses to events. Also troubling, from the perspective of job stress and burnout in staff (Salami, 2011; Tatar and Horenczyk, 2003; Tytherleigh M. *et al.*, 2005; Biron *et al.*, 2008) is the internal tug of war between the increasing need to acquire new skills and competences and competing pressures on HE staff, stretching them in diverse directions (teaching, research, administration, auditing, meetings and more) and leading them to feel overburdened and underachieving. While HE staff (such as in the present study) may generally accept or acquiesce to organisational strategies hinging on self-governance, the purpose and rationale underpinning such activities needs to be carefully considered and balanced against other time and energy consuming tasks and responsibilities, including those associated with student-facing work, such as teaching, tutorials, marking and more. These findings pose questions about the extent to which LDPs can mitigate or increase some of the grosser effects of these pressures or fruitfully impede managerialist agendas.

6.8.3 Neoliberalism and self-care

The idea that self-work requires not only scholarly learning but must be observed and practised through group interaction rituals is not unique to modern learning and

development programmes. The concept of self-cultivation, for example, can be traced back to Confucius and the idea that the individual plays a prominent role in creating the good socio-political order (Gardner, 2014). The Confucian ideal of the cultivated individual was that of the morally ‘superior man,’ who was respectful, tolerant, kind, free from worry, but also resolute and firm (p23). By practicing rituals, and through the power of example, individuals aspired to proper behaviour. Social values and ethical systems can vary a great deal with time and culture, and what is considered morally superior in one society may not be so in another. The rise of neoliberalism since the 1970’s, for example, has led to a greater emphasis on individualism, and self-responsibility, while social welfare and social governance have been financially and ideologically downscaled. In the spirit of individualism, self-care practices have also become a familiar feature of society through journal writing, daily meditation, auditing and so on (Dilts, 2011). Since Foucault’s discussions of governmentality and government of self (Foucault, 1988a; Lemke, 2002), many new forms activities of self-governance have been developed and marketed including in HE, each espousing to relieve contemporary problems such as job stress and social anxiety, but also promoting larger political and organisational agendas.

The modern concept of self-care has gone beyond the individual choice for self advocacy to become a ‘foundation science’ (Denyes *et al.*, 2001) and a moral force in its own right. Within the new economy (and more than in Foucault’s time) people are encouraged to seek out roles and careers which serve as a means of self-expression and actualisation (Hall and Chandler, 2005), and to fulfil their ‘dreams.’ Widely accepted theories such as Senge’s concept of personal mastery within a ‘learning organization’ (Senge, 2006) and Goleman’s concepts of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1999) stress the importance of conscious self-improvement as an ethic and practice in the modern workplace. These types of aspirational practises are incorporated into many LDPs as means of cultivating self-awareness, reducing stress and burnout and fostering greater resilience (Goodman and Schorling, 2012; Tomac, 2012). Modern self-development discourses combining self-care and entrepreneurial

skills can be seen as means of responding to the growing demands of neoliberal careerism (Clarke and Knights, 2015), as supported by literatures on positivity, assertiveness, emotional intelligence, emotional competences (Goleman, 1996; Goleman *et al.*, 2000; Cameron, 2008) and more. Yet, self-realisation in its wider historical and philosophical sense (Ryff, 2014; Bush, 2011), and the self oriented entrepreneurial values and behaviours posited by neoliberalism (Peters, 2001; Dilts, 2011), are in many ways strange bedfellows. When taken out of context and applied in settings where the concern is primarily monetary, rather than ethical or spiritual gains, claims about ‘inner change’ can be contentious (Van Gordon *et al.*, 2016). Critics of neoliberal practises point to contradictions between the messages inherent in self-care and individualism in the sense of unbridled self-seeking (Tudor, 2012), citing examples such as the ambiguous ‘corporate athlete’ role model that has come to represent the neoliberal new work ethic (Kelly *et al.*, 2007).

This new emphasis on self can be also be time consuming and emotionally exhausting, leading critics of neoliberal HE policies to argue that identity insecurities commonly experienced by academic staff should be seen as primarily associated with ‘doing one’s job’ rather than with personal defects or work pathologies (Clarke and Knights, 2015; Berg *et al.*, 2016).

Despite the limitations and manipulation of modern self-care practices, current efforts towards self-fulfilment and genuineness may still be forces for positive change. Nowadays, everyday life has arguably become saturated with ‘toxic levels of inauthenticity’ (Gilmore and Pine, 2007; Vannini and Williams, 2009), in the form of junk emails, bogus face-book pages and so on. Writing on the counter authenticity effects of emotional labour in the 1970’s (such customer facing staff being told to smile all day), Hochschild (1979) predicted the direction of this trend. In the face of the cynical high jacking of the authenticity as a moral concept (Barwell, 2004; Taylor, 1991), more worthy models are required (Braman, 1996; Bell, 1978; Vannini and Williams, 2009) so that individuals can opt for the truly worthwhile and good, as opposed to what is merely self-satisfying and ego rewarding.

6.8.4 Self-care and authenticity

One of the appeals of self-development type courses is that the general sincerity with which both facilitators and participants interact with each other and the learning materials can feel like an antidote to the self-interest, deception and inauthenticity of modern society. Many ‘activities of the self’ espouse the modern ethic of authenticity (Taylor, 1991) and self fulfillment, wherein finding yourself means getting in touch with your inner feelings and the differences between yourself and others. Studies suggest that practises concerned with mindfulness, resilience and authenticity can be associated with positive outcomes, such as decreased anxiety (Dekeyser *et al.*, 2008), a greater sense of wellbeing, better quality of relationships and much more (Bush, 2011; Goodman and Schorling, 2012; Tomac, 2012; Branch and Murray, 2008). These practises are often transferable skills, which have potential benefits for people in many walks of life. Applied in a reflective way, self-care practises, while not denying the influence of free market and neoliberalism, may cause people to question and look beyond traditional versions of knowledge, subject them to a thorough critique (Dilts, 2011), and thereby bring about positive changes and innovations over time. There is, however, little evidence concerning the outcomes of psychological self-care interventions such as mindfulness when badly taught, or applied with selfish rather than selfless intentions. In their systematic review of mindfulness based interventions on the wellbeing and performance of educators, Lomas *et al* (2016a) warn against regarding them as a panacea for stress, or as a sustainable intervention for educational systems that impose stress and their members. Some LDPs do touch on wider socio-political issues (such as gender, diversity, sustainability), but fail to address the inequalities that abound in modern society and within HE, and, by promoting individualism, may deflect attention away from them. While LDPs may appear to occupy a new moral high ground, many aspirations promoted on these programmes are limited and ultimately new management oriented, which could corrupt the original intentions of some self-care practises (Van Gordon *et al.*, 2016).

6.8.5 Neoliberalism and liminality

Self-care is not the only concept to have assumed a different meaning in contemporary life. In an uncertain world, human beings seek to make meaning out of this passage of time through ritual and symbolism. The concept of liminality has long moved from its position as the middle phase of a tribal ritual, and has been variously tested out and employed in organisational contexts, including in the areas of identity reconstruction and cultural change (Beech 2011; Howard-Grenville et al. 2011; Tempest and Starkey 2004). Howard et al (2011) propose a model of cultural change in which everyday work occurrences such as meetings or workshops are constructed symbolically as ‘liminal’ phenomena, that are distinct and yet connected to everyday action in the organisation, thereby challenging conventional top down change models. Tempest and Starkey (2004) suggest that contract work is an example of the ways in which traditional boundaries of organisations are changing and discuss its implications for learning and development. Yet, liminality in the sense of a phase in a holistic cycle of change fits less than perfectly into the messy and ill-defined rituals of modern life. Both neophyte and short-term contractor are in a state of ‘in between-ness,’ however the outcome of this transitory state for each is quite different. Through reintegration rituals (Thomassen, 2011) the neophyte soon enters the phase of aggregation and consolidation, assume a new and elevated status within their society, and thus the cycle is concluded. As Thomassen has observed, this is a critical passage, and without it (that is where there is no consolidation or conclusion) liminality is a dangerous state. The unstable position that the lone ‘career nomad’ (a typology identified in this study) occupies within organisations has little in common with the neophyte who occupies a ritually bound liminal state with fellow neophytes during a particular rite of passage in their life cycle. For many people, there is no certain conclusion to liminality, as it may be one point in a prolonged state of career nomadism. I suggest that neoliberal policies have created for many an imposed state of liminality, with little sense of *communitas* or passage. This has repercussions for LDPs, as managers attempt to engender a sense of belonging and community in what is in reality an unstable and uncertain work environment.

6.9 Performance and authenticity

Performance is a highly complex term, which has different meanings and contexts. In dramaturgical sense in which Goffman (1959) uses it, performance refers to the age old human action of part playing, such that when ‘an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them’ (p4). Looked at from a social interaction ritual perspective, the concept of ‘performing authentically’ is, I suggest, an oxymoron, because human beings are always acting out the role that they feel best suits their purposes. On the other hand, people can perform with more or less integrity (p11). The actor, Goffman tells us may be utterly taken in by his own act and see it as real, or he may not be taken in by it at all. What is important here is that the authenticity of any social performance must be balanced with the impression one wishes to make on others. University staff, from a dramaturgical perspective, can be portrayed as actors performing in many different large and small performances, and experiencing human feelings of shame at ‘losing face’, or pride in their personal achievements. As already discussed however, in organisational contexts the term performance is closely associated with human resource and performance management, which as well as target setting, appraisals and so on, includes the development of a well trained and flexible workforce who can contribute to the organisations ability to adapt to an unpredictable and changing environment (Armstrong, 2006). This is an example of how the meaning ascribed to language varies between academics and practitioners (Fisher-Yoshida *et al.*, 2009) and is altered to suit particular conditions and agendas.

Rather than attempting to explain *why* the managing of change must take place, the dramaturgical approach focuses more on *how* this process is performed (Denzin, 1992), including the ways in which people manage the impressions they make on others. For any actor to perform with integrity, I suggest, certain prerequisites are required. First, a person must have the will (and lack of cynicism) to act authentically (Goffman, 1959, p12); second, they must have the freedom to do so (Petersen, 2004);

and third, they must feel that to do so will not cause them physical or emotional harm, be it due to embarrassment, loss of reputation, ridicule or chastisement (Goffman, 2012).

A learning environment in which the sharing of personal experiences and questioning of perspectives is actively encouraged is a highly vulnerable place (Fisher-Yoshida *et al.*, 2009; Mezirow, 1997). In the workplace, relations of power, status and competition bind human interactions, which then influence the aspects of self one is willing and comfortable to reveal (Brownlie, 2011). As Varga (2011) points out, authenticity presupposes that the individual is capable of following self-imposed principles independently of political and social structures, which may be out of the question in the modern workplace. A problem of combining performance management practices with other types of performativity within LDPs concerns the perceived safety of revealing oneself in a work environment, especially when managers are present. While the relatively relaxed and discreet atmosphere of LDPs can encourage staff to open up authentically, goal settings, power differentials, and messages that certain types of personality or emotion are more or less preferred (as illustrated in the emphasis on ‘success stories’) can mitigate against authenticity. It can be argued that the favouring of the ‘entrepreneurial performance’ requires people to act in particular ways and to create a particular impression (such as being an ‘authentic leader’ or a good role model), which puts pressure on individuals to perform in prescribed ways, for example to follow ‘designer leadership’ (Gronn, 2003) behaviours, and this may not coincide with their true personality type or beliefs. The higher the stakes, in terms of personal and professional outcomes, the more likely it is that attempts will be made to create a particular impression on others (Ng and Kidder, 2010) at the expense of personal authenticity. This can place individuals in an emotionally tricky position in which they feel impelled to act out individualistic practises such as assertiveness, resilience, self confidence, positivity and so on, which may not feel entirely authentic or congruent with their personal goals and values, raising questions about what freedom means in a market driven society (Kusina,

2014). Ironically the self-determination and authenticity espoused by neoliberalism are, via its soft governance practices, frequently turned on their heads.

Yet, casting academics in the role of ‘victims,’ obscures their pivotal role within this change process. As more and more academics actively assume middle and senior management positions, so the traditional divide between corporate and faculty staff becomes more blurred (Floyd and Dimmock, 2011; Kezar and Lester, 2009; Whitchurch, 2008). One of the means that HE employees both higher and lower down the career ladder use to cope with the demands of this increasingly unstable, competitive and individualistic workplace is through participating in soft skills development events. While the mounting demands of new managerialism in HE may seem at odds with traditional roles within, and values of, academia, the reality is that senior academics are been trained in leadership and management roles, and this appears to spearhead the future direction of HR led staff training. On the other hand, an assumption that improved work performance in the managerial sense and individual and collective empowerment and wellbeing are necessarily achievable at the same time, and through similar methods, needs to be subject to continuous scrutiny by critical researchers within HE. I suggest that a more fined tuned approach to staff engagement in higher education may be required, through which both individuals and the university itself are more able to meet the challenges of growing student and public demands. A key part of transformation would be the structuring of teaching and research through action learning research strategies (Lysø *et al.*, 2011; Levin and Greenwood, 2013). How this might be fully realised has to be the subject of a further study.

6.10 Summary

In this discussion, I set out to explain and interpret the social worlds of LDPs and their singular attributes, including promoting creativity, enjoyment, intra-and inter-organisational relationships, collaborations and friendly competitiveness between staff, and providing the time and space for individuals to ‘take stock’ and examine

their priorities. I have critically examined the socio-political context of LDPs drawing attention to the mechanisms of soft governance and accountability within HE. My study cohort included both fully-fledged 'career nomads' and 'reluctant entrepreneurs,' yet even the latter saw the necessity of complying with the rules of the neoliberal HE marketplace. Over half the academic staff interviewed performed as 'career hybrids,' in the sense that they were balancing teaching responsibilities and research activities with more entrepreneurial roles, such as working with businesses or running private consultancies. All this suggests that a new type of careerism is emerging within HE, accompanied by what Clarke suggests is now an exceedingly fragile sense of identity for academics as they engage in a now largely unrealisable attempt to secure their (academic) self (Clarke et al. 2012, p. 14), while finding themselves increasingly cast as entrepreneurial agents of change within the university.

Drawing on the concept of rite of passage as described by Turner (1969), I have explained in this discussion how the ritual aspects of the LDP social world, and the symbols it employs, can engender in participants such as myself a distinct sense of entrance into a defined world, and a passage with a beginning, middle and completion phase, and as such can create a sense of accomplishment in participants who complete the programme. Contemporary working life is relatively bereft of rituals, and these features may be one reason for the appeal of LDPs for some regular attendees (course hoppers) such as myself. My observations of the sense of 'communitas' generated during events associated with new change agendas is that these feelings although memorable are ephemeral and can be too easily replaced by cynicism when staff realise that their efforts may fail to reach fruition before the next strategic change wave hits them. In the concluding chapter, I summarise my findings, discuss the original contribution of this work, and reflect on my experiences of conducting autoethnography.

Chapter 7 : Conclusion

In this final chapter, I present my overall study conclusions, bearing in mind that insights arise in their own way and time, and that my learning from this study is an ongoing process. In section 7.1, I summarise the points made in this study and examine its socio-political implications. In 7.2, I draw comparisons with other studies, and in 7.3, I consider the future direction of LDPs in HEIs. In section 7.4, I consider what I regard as the original contribution of this study to knowledge, and in 7.5 its contribution to practice, including my study outputs. Section 7.6 concerns my study implications and recommendations. I conclude this work in section 7.7 with my summative reflection, final thoughts on my ethnographic experiences, and a short narrative prologue.

As social worlds, LDPs featuring soft skills and other self-development practices offer and fulfill a number of practical and affective functions for staff within HE. Data from this study confirms their potential to propel personal and group competences, generate positive ‘emotional energy’ and partially mitigate staff isolation. From a social interaction perspective, LDPs provide staff with opportunities to engage in relationship building in a relatively informal environment, where people are encouraged to exchange stories, air their feelings and views, and acquire information from one another (Baumeister *et al.*, 2004). As adult learning and development forums, LDPs offer a range of experiential learning activities that, by engaging staff in interpersonal work and reflexive performances, help them to develop competences and skills to apply in ‘real world’ contexts. In terms of career building, many staff soft skills programmes train staff in self-marketing and leadership skills, while some add qualifications to their CV, and fulfil institutional competency requirements, such as equality and diversity training. Despite the limitations of LDPs in terms of their accessibility to some staff, findings from this study suggest that they are one of the most embodied, enjoyable and communal components of staff training and development.

Another set of concepts explored in this study concerns the place of ritual, symbolism and collective feeling in the LDP social worlds and culture. Drawing on Goffman's work on performance and impression management (Goffman 1959) and juxtaposing this with conceptualisations of 'embodied' group feeling in the form of collective effervescence (Durkheim, 1912), emotional energy (Collins, 2004) and *communitas* (Turner, 1969) or collective joy (Turner, 2012), I have considered why attempts to fully 'immerse' myself in the LDP social worlds, including their rituals and ethos were, on an emotional level, only partially successful.

7.1 Summary of study

Over a period 18 months, I inhabited what I came to conceptualise as the LDP social world, exploring the culture of this world from the perspective of stakeholders in this world. This study represents just a snapshot of this world, as interpreted by myself and participants are interviewed, nevertheless it can add to the understanding of what has been until now a largely unexamined part of HE culture. In this section I summarise my project findings in relation to my main research questions.

The first question I asked concerned how staff members, including myself, who attend LDPs, perceive their experiences of LDPs within the organisational framework, including in relation to their own professional and emotional needs. Secondly, I asked what purposes these programmes serve for participants as they navigate their way through the modern workplace. My study findings suggest that LDPs featuring soft skills offer and fulfill a number of practical and affective functions, which were recognised by participants including myself. From a social interaction perspective they emerged as an embodied, enjoyable and communal component of staff training and development, providing actors with a space, in which they can temporarily redefine themselves vis-à-vis the group and the wider social world. The ritual aspects of the LDP social world help to create for participants a sense of passage with a beginning, middle and completion phase, which in contrast to the unending state of liminality associated with modern life may help explain their appeal to temporary

staff, or part time staff such as myself. The relative safety and intimacy of LDPs provides participants with a space in which they can temporarily at least find a sense of identity and belonging within a large and fast changing organisation. The theatrical elements of LDPs add to enjoyment and emotional engagement, but can be viewed as manipulative tools encouraging academic staff in particular to emotionally invest in an increasingly mandatory entrepreneurial culture, with which they might otherwise be reluctant to engage.

Another question asked concerned the extent to which LDPs can mitigate the gross effects of work stress and promote wellbeing, while serving the demands of new managerial agendas, and the potential paradoxes within this. To appreciate the background to this study, I turned to the writings on neoliberalism and its effects on the modern workplace. This led me to consider my findings in the light of the rapid escalation of managerial practises within HE institutions, and the applicability of Foucault's ideas on technologies of the self (1988a, 1998b, 1989) to activities on LDPs. Based on my personal experiences and observations, I proposed three major subdivisions of these 'activities of the self;' self-entrepreneurial activities (Foucault, 2008b; Peters, 2001), self-care (Foucault, 1988b, 1998) and self-examination (Ecclestone, 2007, 2012). Together these self-oriented pursuits, I have suggested, constitute a hybridised form of self-governance prevalent in the type of modern organization I have explored (Ball, 2015; Kooiman and van Vliet, 2000).

Finally, I asked what insights can be gained from an ethnographic perspective on LDPs concerning the relationship/tensions between needs of staff, institutional targets and wider social and market forces? The answer to this question requires a broad perspective, and is evidenced throughout my findings and discussion points, including those on self-care, liminality and *communitas* (see also 7.1.1). Findings from this ethnography confirm that staff in universities, such as the one in this study, operate in social worlds in which audit, accountability and performativity are viewed as increasingly important (Knight, 2012; Knights and Clarke, 2013; Floyd and

Dimmock, 2011; Ecclestone, 2012), and LDPs reflect the demands and ethos of this wider domain. I suggest that while LDPs can improve staff engagement, the neoliberal ethos with which they are imbued means that they fail to tackle the wider issues of unequal levels of participation and social inequalities. LDPs, I argue, inhabit a paradoxical position in which their ethos and practices broadly promote management goals and self-governance (for example, increased self responsibility and aspirational thinking) while at the same time offering remedies for the problems associated with it through such things as resilience training, mindfulness and time management courses. By focusing attention on personal and professional attributes and agency within and beyond the organisation and on the 'sunny side of life' through positive psychology discourses (Fineman, 2006), LDPs implicitly or explicitly discourage both negative oral or emotional expression. This, combined with attempts to boost people's sense of self-efficacy and increase personal and organisational aspirations, may lead to sense of frustration and disempowerment if these ambitions are not supported by existing infrastructures in the longer term. In the following section, I explain my conclusions concerning liminality, *communitas* and modern society.

7.1.1 Liminality, communitas and modern society

The transition of participants through the LDP world can be likened to a rite of passage. Entering the LDP social arena with its various props or artefacts and symbolic behaviours signifies the participant's temporary separation from their usual work role. The various features of LDPs are designed to encourage some sense of separateness and status-less in participants, allowing them to shed existing identities and new ones to form. The term 'liminal' in its original sense of threshold should however, be used with caution in contemporary workplace contexts. As I suggest in my discussion, the transitory state of the contract worker is not necessarily followed by a state of aggregation within the existing social world, but may simply represent one point in a process of career nomadism. I also considered the place of communal emotion on LDPs, testing out the concepts of emotional energy, embodiment and

communitas within the context of my findings. I concluded that, at their most dynamic and engaging, interaction rituals on LDPs generated for participants (including myself), an elevated sense of collectiveness, which could be described as communitas. Edith Turner (2012) describes communitas as the group's pleasure in sharing common experiences with one another (p2), an egoless state in which life takes on full meaning. I suggest that this utopian state may be hard to achieve or at least sustain in an environment imbued with neoliberal culture, and where cynicism is prevalent. As fast profit replaces holistic practices, so rituals with defined beginnings, middles and endings become less significant and less celebrated in the workplace. This in turn adds to a general sense of instability and uncertainty, and to the state of permanent 'liminality' or transition some authorities attribute to modern society (Szakolczai, 2000). In the next section, I outline my conclusions concerning the socio-political implications of this study.

7.1.2 Socio-political implications of study

As the global market has become one that is driven primarily by entrepreneurship, so universities have become key players in the enhancement of human entrepreneurship capital and in facilitating the types of behaviours and competences required to prosper in an entrepreneurial society (Audretsch, 2014). The future effects of these profound cultural and strategic changes in HE are hard to predict, but the present trend is moving towards increasingly performance driven staff development strategies in UK universities (Clarke, 2011; Olssen and Peters, 2005; Berg *et al.*, 2016; Levin and Greenwood, 2013). Some studies suggest that new forms of performance management, as implemented in universities across the world, have disrupted academic life, threatening to destroy the very essence of what it is to be an academic (Kallio *et al.*, 2015). In one study examining job satisfaction and job stress across 19 HE systems, increased hierarchical structures and market oriented managerial reforms were associated with higher academic stress and low staff satisfaction (Shin and Jung, 2014).

According to a recent staff evaluation survey in the University (Westminster, 2016), although 52% of staff felt they were kept informed about changes at work, only 32% of staff felt they had sufficient input into those changes at work which affected them, and only 28% thought that important issues and problems were discussed openly. The growing volume of administrative work and the extra demands this places on staff during what is now a short and highly demanding academic year must inevitably limit voluntary attendance of academics and researchers on LDPs, and can affect corporate service staff too. It could also be argued that the identities of academics are largely tied to teaching and research, thus expecting all or most of them to emotionally engage in work activities with which they have low identification and meager emotional investment (administration, entrepreneurship etc.) may continue to prove problematic.

Valuable as they are in the teaching of soft skills, LDPs offer only partial solutions to these deeper identity issues, and also to other stressors such as increasing emphasis on performance targets and REF outputs (Winefield and Jarrett, 2001; Biron *et al.*, 2008; Catano *et al.*, 2010). On an emotional level, the process of updating and learning new skills, while apparently good in terms of lifelong learning, may feel endlessly time consuming and stressful for staff who are already feeling stretched (Honneth, 2004; Cederström, 2011; Kelly *et al.*, 2007). Paradoxically it is those staff who might benefit from the time out, collegiate support and networking opportunities afforded by LDPs who, for practical and timetabling reasons, may not consider attendance as a productive use of their time and energy.

7.2 Comparisons with other studies

My conclusions concerning the problematic nature of neoliberal self-governance practices are not unique; other studies have critically discussed their effects on HE staff (Czarniawska and Genell, 2002; Lam, 2011; Bishop and Waring, 2016). Clarke and Knight's study of a UK Business School (2015) for example, found academics subjected to technologies of power and self and 'objects of an organisational gaze

through normalising judgements, hierarchical observations and examinations' (p1865). Of course, unmanaged and unmanageable areas of organisations exist (Gabriel, 1999), such as back stage conversations, critical discourses and minor rebellions, but these types of actions can be subject to disciplinary procedure.² In both my own and the above study, most HE staff members interviewed appeared to accept the inevitability of increased managerialism within HE, and some had tried to capitalise on it. Drawing from interview data, I have adopted three typologies of staff according to their 'careering' (Clarke and Knights, 2015) behaviours; 'career nomads' describes staff members, mostly on short term contracts, who presently see themselves as mobile in the work sense; 'reluctant self-entrepreneurs' describes staff (in this study mostly academics) who broadly adopt a 'needs must' attitude to self-entrepreneurial and management driven practises; and 'career hybrids' to describe those business minded academics who have redefined or diversified their work roles within and beyond the institution. I have used the term 'course hoppers' for staff members who are frequent attenders of soft skills LDPs. The categories identified in this study, which participants may be seen to embody, are not mutually exclusive and I regard myself as a potential candidate for all of the last three groups. Absent from the data collected in this study are the voices of those staff who do not attend LDPs or were not included in my follow up interviews, which limits aspects of the study findings and their wider applicability to these groups. However, as Whitchurch argues, by changing nomenclatures of increasingly complex working practices, the 'on-going mutation of identities' is brought to light (Whitchurch, 2008), and the process of revealing hitherto unexamined or tacitly understood aspects of experience may also prompt wider discussion and reflection on issues of identity formation among these absent groups. These new terminologies also acknowledge the contested nature of work place identities, while challenging existing conceptions. In my study, the cogency of these categorisations has to a limited extent been tested out with HR stakeholders and

² An example of this is the case of critical philosopher, Prof. Thomas Docherty, author of 'Universities at War' Sage, 2014.

academics involved in commissioning, designing and evaluating programmes during presentations, and which were recognisable to my audience.

Taken as a whole, my findings support the assertion that neoliberal values such as work mobility, self-entrepreneurism, individualism, self-responsibility and self-governance (Berg *et al.*, 2015; Peters, 2012; Tudor, 2012) are of increasing importance in HEIs such as the one under study (Olssen, 2004; Hamann and John, 2009; Davies *et al.*, 2006), and by extension suggesting a wider trend in this direction within contemporary society (Hamann and John, 2009). Depending on their motivation, job role and status, people more or less successfully seek out and find ways to capitalise on self-improvement and careering opportunities, or to cope with the stresses of modern work life, including through participating in LDPs. My specific conclusions concerning hybridised contemporary forms of self-governance can provide a sharper theoretical explanation for the inherent paradoxes within staff development initiatives and injunctions to respond to what may be contradictory messages. To discern the scope of their applicability and to further sharpen their conceptual parameters, I propose testing these theories in different organisational contexts, including other HEIs.

7.3 Future direction of LDPs

These are turbulent times, within HE and society in general. In times of austerity, priorities change and already the UK's proposed departure from the EU is heralding cuts within HE, including on staff development. Perverse though it may be, the fallout from the 'Brexit' decision has proved the need for a flexible and self-resilient HE workforce that is emotionally prepared to adapt or move on. Recent discussions with University managers tasked with the commissioning of LDPs, suggest that these types of face-to-face, time intensive activities will be subject to budget reductions, with greater degrees of monitoring and reporting required for their continuation. HRM and OD&W managers reported facing tough decisions concerning how to commission and deliver high calibre courses, some of which are under professional accreditation, on a

slimmer budget, with potential cost saving ideas such as the greater use of internal venues and training up of in-house staff to act as facilitators being considered. Whatever the chosen ways to achieve it, at the time of writing, the training of senior managers in leadership and team-building skills, and provision of suitable programmes for senior academic teams remain a learning and development priority. In terms of promoting staff wellbeing and productivity across the University, this makes good sense, but only if the developmental and emotional needs of those working under managers are also considered. One consequence of the increasing use of semi-automated professional development and appraisal systems is that the frequency of and time set aside for regular face-to-face contact and meaningful conversations with line managers could continue to diminish unless or until the necessity of slowing down the pace of new management practices within HE is realised. This study focuses on a particular university at a particular time and quite different practices and models might well exist in other HEIs, or come to pass in my own place of work. Semi-automation itself may not be a barrier if used wisely, and if it part of a holistic strategy aimed at appraising staff performance and encouraging engagement in personal and professional development.

At the same time, my wider investigations suggest that changes can and are taking place in both ethos and practises within HE organisations, with positive implications for employees and student engagement and wellbeing. Examples of cross-university projects and participative ventures between staff and students do exist within the University, such as the work undertaken by the University of Westminster Centre for Resilience (Centre for Resilience) and the action research project RAW, described later in this chapter. I finish this section with two points made Klev and Levin (2012) concerning the process of organisational transformation; social and not a mechanical process are the catalyst for change and, employees are more likely to embrace change when they have helped to democratically shape it.

7.4. Original contribution to knowledge

This study aims to offer an important and unique contribution to knowledge and research practice, in particular in the following areas: it fills an important gap in the literature on the lived experiences of staff in universities; it represents a uniquely critical and academically informed contribution to the literature on soft skills; it extends the use of a still-emerging methodology, autoethnography; it situates the theories of self-care (Foucault, 1988a, 1989) and liminality (Turner, 1967, 1969) in a 21st century educational context; and it explores, critiques and compares thorny concepts of performance and authenticity from dramaturgical and organisational development positions. In the following sections I seek to explain and support these claims.

7.4.1 Contribution to literature on staff experience and soft skills

My search of the literature suggests that, despite their ubiquitous presence in HE, staff learning and development programmes (LDPs) featuring soft skills remain a largely uncharted dimension of global university culture. A rigorous search of the literature revealed few studies qualitatively examining the experiences of staff who attend these programmes, their rationale for participating in them (Junrat *et al.*, 2014; Ngang *et al.*, 2013; Lomas *et al.*, 2016), and what this reveals about the changing nature of the HE workplace and identities of those within it. In this study I explored between the gaps in the literature to design a project that could present a candid account of the lived experiences of selected groups of staff within a contemporary university setting. A re-appraisal study of equivalent LDPs in the University in one to 2 years, or a similar study conducted in a different HE context, provided this was able to sufficiently control the variables, would substantially add to the value of the present study and its findings and potentially shed further light on the transitory nature of the LDP social world.

My analysis of the literature on soft skills surveyed confirmed that the majority of textual and online information on this topic is anecdotal, promotional and market

driven. The political and economic forces promulgating soft skills, and the darker and more manipulative side to the soft skills culture have, with the exception of some critics (Fineman, 2006), been largely discounted. This study posed what I regard as some pertinent and challenging questions concerning the nature and intent of soft skills programmes, their neoliberal ethos, and their meaning for participants.

7.4.2 Extending autoethnography

In this section, I consider what I have learned about autoethnography through this study, how it has increased and challenged my previous understanding of this method, and the part this work can play in extending the uses of autoethnography for exploring areas of institutions that traditional methodologies find hard to penetrate.

I have previously authored an autoethnography (Fixsen, 2015), however that particular paper was highly personal and had little to do with my work-role, or with workplace culture and practices. While I was aware that autoethnography has a broad scope, it took prompting from my examiners to recognise the true potential of my thesis as an autoethnographic text. Reconsidering my methodology in this way has led to some editing, restructuring and reconnecting with my thoughts, feelings and observations throughout this work, as documented in my field-note journals. The melding of personal and professional roles for the ethnographer can be a messy business (Marcus and Fischer, 1986, p22), and the institutionally positioned autoethnographer treads a delicate path, all the more so when exploring areas potent with emotion. As I explain at more length in my summative reflections (section 7.7), undertaking and completing this autoethnography has led me to consider the multiplicity of identities (researcher, employee, participant, work colleague) which, as autoethnographer, I took with me, or which emerged, during my time in the LDP social world, not all of which fitted neatly together. As a member of staff still working part time for the organisation under study, there were political issues such as access and loyalty that I had to sensitively address, while at the same time retaining my autonomy and self-determination as a doctoral researcher.

Since its conception as a methodology in the 1970's, autoethnography has continued to challenge conventions (Tamas, 2009; Holt, 2003; Ellis *et al.*, 2011), with its theoretical variations and applications expanding in different directions and within diverse disciplines (Cann and DeMeulenaere, 2012; Doloriert and Sambrook, 2012; Uotinen, 2011). I set out to enter explore and interpret what I regarded as an emotionally sensitive ecology (Jewkes, 2012), and to increase the cultural consciousness of first myself and then others who read or hear about this work (Chang, 2006). While still a relatively new method for exploring the culture of large organisations, with its politically conscious heritage (Ellis et al., 2011; Ngunjiri et al., 2010), autoethnography has the potential to challenge taken-for-granted practices and to suggest new ways of reordering internal systems. I follow in the footsteps of others who use autoethnography to explore within their own higher educational institution, including Sparke's study of embodiment in academic culture (Sparkes, 2007), Hayler's narrative on the professional identity of university lecturers (Hayler, 2011) and Doloreit and Sambrook's joint tale of the PhD thesis and viva voce (Doloriert and Sambrook, 2011). By electing to use autoethnography and treating research as both a self-conscious and socially conscious act, I have extended the range of tools applicable to staff learning and development appraisal.

7.4.3 Contribution to theory: self-care, liminality and performance

In this section, I outline what I consider to be the unique contribution of the study to theory, in particular in following areas: self-care and self-governance, liminality and performance in organisational contexts.

The historical perspective of self-care presented by Foucault in the 1970's could be considered out-dated in certain ways. For example, during Foucault's time the full effects of new capitalism and neoliberalism on institutional culture had yet to be fully realised. This study applies the Foucauldian representation of self-care as a socio-political power-related technology, within a 21st century context. It extends theory

around self-governance by proposing three major subdivisions; self-entrepreneurial activities, self-care, and self-examination (which together constitute a hybrid form of self-governance) and identifies different categories of activity in this area. In addition, new typologies associated with new workplace identities emerged from my study findings; 'career nomad,' 'reluctant entrepreneur' and 'course hopper, which may prove useful for further research into modern workplace identities. The above concepts emerged from a real world context as based on the lived experiences of staff participating in a variety of different self-governance practices, and as such represent important contributions to theory and practice of self-care and its implications for modern identity formation.

Another set of propositions explored and extended in the study concerns the employment of rituals and symbols to modern workplace practices, as on LDPs, and the meaning ascribed to them by stakeholders. To understand and interpret these practices I have drawn on the ideas of Victor Turner (1969) and Edith Turner (2012) on the rite of passage and the liminality. The performative and ritualistic aspects of the LDP social world can, I have suggested, create for participants such as myself a distinct sense of entrance into a defined world and a passage with a beginning, middle and summative phase, and as such can represent a completed cycle for candidates in this process.

As explained in my discussion, the meanings of the term liminality have radically diversified (Beech 2011; Howard-Grenville et al. 2011; Tempest and Starkey 2004); for example Tempest and Starkey (2004) use it to explain the ways in which traditional boundaries of organisations are changing. I have argued that such interpretations threaten to corrupt the original meaning of liminality as a threshold state, since the unstable position that the lone contract worker occupies within organisations has little in common with the ritually bound liminal state the neophyte occupies with fellow neophytes, during their passage through a particular life cycle. I conclude that the conditions of the contemporary workplace as reflected in my chosen

setting have created for many an imposed state of transition or liminality, with little sense of *communitas* or passage.

Dramaturgical theory, as used by sociologists, has a long history in organisational and educational literature, and I make no claims to novelty in this area. In this study I have considered the problems of applying the term performance to staff learning and development activities. I have pointed out that the theatrical elements of LDPs can be seen as tools to encourage academic staff in particular to emotionally invest in an increasingly mandatory entrepreneurial culture with which they might otherwise be reluctant to engage. I have further argued that the ‘entrepreneurial performance’ requires people to create a particular impression (such as being an ‘authentic leader’ or a good role model), which puts pressure on individuals to perform in prescribed ways that challenge theory around authenticity (e.g. authentic leadership) in the workplace (Hannah, Walumbwa, and Fry 2011; Wang and Hsieh 2013). In this way, I have deepened understanding of the complexity of, and contradictions inherent in, the use of the term performance and authenticity in what could be considered a representative workplace setting.

7.5 Contribution to practice

I have some scope and potential to change some of my own work practices, however given my senior lecturer role and part-time status, any power I have within the institution will be limited. On the other hand, I can contribute to positive, ethical change within my university and beyond in a number of ways, and have already been in a position to develop good practice within my own sphere of influence. In the following sections, I examine how this has been achieved, and how I plan to use my experience and research expertise within and beyond the university. I start by considering the internal outputs and impact of this research, including how my learning and experiences have informed my own work, and how my findings have been, and will be, shared with major stakeholders. I then examine the external outputs of this work, including dissemination of my findings, discuss how my learning from

this study is already contributing to a cross-organisational action-learning project, and identify areas still under development.

In my role as senior lecturer, I lead and teach on a number of soft skills courses at undergraduate level. One of my project objectives was to incorporate effective soft skills activities into newly designed or redesigned undergraduate modules and staff development workshops. My ethnographic work coincided with the introduction of a new learning and teaching programme (Learning Futures) across the University, under which existing and new modules were developed and revalidated in line with fresh learning and development strategies using new definitions of both staff and graduate attributes. During the period 2014/16, I, like other module leaders, was occupied with the module redevelopment and revalidation process. As of September 2016, the level 3 Biosciences module, Perspectives in Health, and level 5 cross faculty module, Effective Communication Skills for Healthcare Professionals became 20 credit modules, with a distinctly interactive focus. The Learning Futures programme also presented staff such as myself with an opportunity to conceptualise and design new cross faculty modules, and my proposal for the module Developing Communication Skills for Professional Life, was selected to commence in 2016/17. In the course of the module development, and in recognition of my doctoral work, I was tasked with designing an entirely soft skills based module for cross university level 5 students and with recruiting a cross disciplinary team to teach on it. Both the ethos and design for the new module were directly informed by lessons learned from this project concerning successful practices, for instance I incorporated a wide range of experiential learning activities, including group discussion, 'home' groups, role-play exercises, multimedia, peer-led projects and external visits into the module structure. I was also able to incorporate my time on the Learning Futures LDPs into my ethnographic fieldwork, taking opportunities to be a participant observer at a staff residential and various staff development events, and subsequently exploring these experiences reflectively and dramaturgically.

A further outcome of my fieldwork and my attendance on a professionally accredited coaching and mentoring course is that I am now a qualified coach and mentor, and am working with staff and students within and outside organisation in this capacity. Since June 2016, I have been part of the University coaching research group, and contribute to their regular meetings. In January 2017, I was one of a few staff to be accepted onto an internally funded coaching and mentoring higher diploma, which will afford me more opportunities for coaching staff and student teams within the faculty. In the following sections I explain how I have, and will, use joint cross-disciplinary and cross-divisional opportunities to disseminate the outcomes and impact of this work for a range of audiences, including academic publications.

7.5.1 Cultural and strategic impact on HRM and OD&W

Each summer, managers from HRM and OD&W undertake a full review of previous LDPs, and prepare for the year ahead. Their strategic plans are informed by information from the staff PPDR process, discussions with departmental heads, previous evaluations and feedback on programmes, and other information sources. Given the size and complexity of this process, matching and predicting organisational and staff needs must inevitably be partly conjectured. As an insider ethnographer, I was in the privileged and relatively unique position of having access to a social world that, from an in-depth qualitative perspective, has hitherto been largely unexplored. The qualitative data I bring from this study provides a novel, ground level perspective for stakeholder decision makers, which can inform and feed into this complex planning process. In this section, I describe how this has so far been achieved, and how I plan to take this further in the near future.

In April 2015, I shared my preliminary findings with two organisational development (OD) managers. In addition to providing me with useful feedback and suggestions concerning forthcoming programmes, these managers expressed strong interest in my work, and invited me for further consultation when my fieldwork was more complete. My first formal presentation to senior HR managers took place in April 2016, at

which point my analysis was at a more advanced stage. I then met with the director of OD&W to discuss how this work might be best shared with managers from across the department. On the basis of this discussion it was agreed that I should host an interactive workshop for all HR and OD&W managers in October 2016, during their Away Day event, which led to offers of project collaborations, including a mentoring project and the action research project described below. When designing my presentations to HRM and OD&W staff I was mindful of the potential sensitivity of presenting insider information to stakeholders, however by employing a dramaturgical approach I believe I avoided any personal offense and brought the shared narrative concerning LDPs to life.

As a result of follow up discussions after this presentation, I was invited to join the Resilience and Wellbeing (RAW) action research project, whose members include both corporate service staff and academics from across the University. Broadly, the aims of the project are to improve the wellbeing of staff, students and all other stakeholders, and to consolidate the University's strategies and efforts to provide the best possible environment for all. The project has already been through one learning cycle in which its construct and purpose were established (Coghlan and Brannick, 2005). My involvement commenced at the 'design stage', when the group were splitting into streams. I elected to use my experiences within the strand involved in designing, planning and organising up-coming staff LDPs, and generating other initiatives aimed at increasing staff wellbeing. My knowledge and understanding of soft skills and LDPs have already proved to be useful in team meetings when conceptualising and designing new initiatives. Among the suggestions already taken up by the team for further development is that of providing vibrant social and learning spaces in which staff can meet together (Fisher-Yoshida *et al.*, 2009), in order to promote embodied engagement and encourage creative conversations. I am presently exploring with colleagues how group effects such as emotional energy and entrainment can be applied within LDPs to encourage moral or actual alliances between staff from different sectors of the university or outside of it. In January 2017,

our group will host a staff learning and development event for HRM and academic senior managers, in an external open plan venue, using art, role-play and multimedia to promote a creative and non-hierarchical environment. In the long term, the project will work to establish a greater community and promote well-being practices to all staff across the university. I have offered to write about and publish a full report of our work, and am in discussions about how this can be best achieved with my line manager and key members of this team.

7.5.2 Presentations and conference papers

Findings from this study have been shared with members of the academic community in the following ways. In January 2016, I led a 3-hour seminar for postdoctoral students, which focused on the analysis of my findings, and received requests for written sections of my work. Another workshop is due to take place in May 2017. In July 2016, I delivered a presentation to academic staff at the University Learning and Teaching symposium. The audience was small, but my conceptual framework was well received, triggered a lengthy discussion around staff learning and development and work practises and lead to several requests for articles on my work to be forwarded to staff. I will be delivering another presentation based on my thesis at the next University Learning and Teaching symposium in June 2017.

I have also shared my work with researchers at three international conferences. In Sept 2015 I presented my preliminary findings at the European Sociological Association (ESA) International Conference, Prague. ESA is a non-profit making academic association of sociologists, which publishes research and organises conferences that contribute to European level debates and developments (ESA, 2016), and I am a member of the sociology of emotion and sociology of education streams. Following my presentation to the sociology of emotion stream, I received feedback from experienced researchers, which was extremely useful for further development of my analysis and discussion. For instance, I had not at this stage come across the work of Richard Sennett (Dohmen, 2006; Sennett, 1998) whose arguments helped to

deepen my understanding of the effects of new capitalism on workplace ethics. In March 2016 I put forward a poster presentation, which, along with other posters produced by colleagues on the University professional doctorate in education programme, was presented at a professional doctorate conference in Belfast in April 2016. While I did not attend the conference, the feedback from the course leader was that our posters were well received. In Sept 2016, I gave an oral presentation at the ESA conference 'Education and Empowerment: Theories and Practices,' in Milan, in the session on Higher Education: Facing transforming institutions. I decided to focus this presentation on my theoretical constructs concerning self-governance and activities of the self.' Participants described this presentation as 'excellent' and its content formed the basis of my first journal paper (see below). I have since received a number of requests for my completed paper from conference participants. A further conference paper has been accepted for presentation at the ESA International conference in Athens, in August 2017.

7.5.3 Report and Journal papers

A summary report of my professional doctorate findings has been sent to the head of senior HRM and OD&W for further dissemination (see extract in appendix 6) This report sets out the study background, aims and objectives of the project, findings and conclusions, and the various ways that these findings can be utilised. As a heuristic study and ethnography, my study aims to socially and cultural interpret and inform my audience rather than advocate concrete changes in policy. Practical points are however made in my report, based upon study findings, aimed at enhancing future staff development and wellbeing projects across the University. Overall my findings suggest a multidisciplinary, action learning oriented approach to future staff learning and development is required. Other suggestions are to: continue to focus on face-to-face workshops and on use of role-play and multimedia; run workshops and longer courses outside the main undergraduate teaching period where possible; involve academics, especially those experienced in expressive and performing arts, in the design and delivery of new LDPs; select locations removed from workplace activities,

ensuring rooms are spacious enough to prevent small group conversations from being overheard; reduce duplication of similar soft skills programmes and initiatives offered to staff across the University (e.g. coaching and mentoring initiatives) which are resource consuming and might confuse potential applicants; create short video clips on popular workshops for staff to clarify their purpose and content; promote the use of internal coaching and mentoring within the faculties; create ‘break out’ areas for all staff (including academics) in which informal learning can take place.

Three peer-review papers have been prepared from this study. The first paper, ‘Self-care and entrepreneurship: Revisiting soft skills learning and development for staff through ethnography’ has been submitted to the journal, *Studies in Continuing Education*. The paper is co-authored by Steven Cranfield and Damien Ridge (see appendix 4 for extract). A second paper, ‘Performance and rites of passage through staff development programs’ is under final preparation for submission to the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* (see appendix 5 for extract). A third paper, ‘Mixing work with therapy on staff learning and development programmes: an autoethnography,’ is presently being peer read for comments.

7.6 Implications and recommendations

I consider the confidence placed in me by my institutional sponsors to pursue an ethnographic approach to the work, within the limits and expectations I carefully set for it, to have been amply repaid. I anticipate that, as they are more widely disseminated, my findings will generate interest among senior academic teams involved in strategic planning, as well as HRM/OD&W sections. Having engaged in projects with researchers working in other HEIs and organisations before and during my doctoral work, I have an established research network to draw on. Here I consider two methodologies, which I believe I could use in further research initiatives within or outside my organisation; collaborative ethnography and action learning research.

With its ability to bring obscure and murky matters to light and raise awkward questions about internal processes (Taylor, 2011) ethnography has been subject to criticism and even censorship by some organisations. This might dim my prospects of using ethnography again within my own university, and lead me to seek out opportunities for utilising my ethnographic skills elsewhere. At the same time, there is much to be gained by organisations being presented with a clear, grassroots perspective of their own internal processes and culture, and arguably this can be best achieved through ethnography. One potential solution to the ‘insider dilemma’ might be a collaborative ethnography. Collaboration is central to all ethnographic practice, however in an explicitly collaborative ethnography, shared practice becomes part of every stage of the ethnographic process. This method deliberately invites commentary from consultants and seeks to make that commentary overtly part of the ethnographic text as it develops. In turn, this negotiation is reintegrated back into the fieldwork process itself (Lassiter, 2005). While this may not be achievable within my own place of work, one idea would be to ‘swop’ ethnographic skills with other ethnographers, researching collaboratively within each other’s institutions and then synthesising findings, for instance concerning health and well being initiatives in these universities. As a concept this needs further development but it may well be something I can pursue in the future.

Another potential vehicle of organisational research for collaborative change is that of action learning research. Action learning is one of the most widely used interventions for developing organisations and leadership (Lysø *et al.*, 2011). As a methodology, action learning research is well suited to HE settings (Greenwood and Levin, 2001; Levin and Greenwood, 2013; Zimmer, 2001) and may offer the best hope for successful university reform (Greenwood and Levin, 2001). The rationale behind this approach is that, for people within an organisation to feel and act differently, the system within the organisation must undergo transformations itself, toward a more democratic and equitable system (Flood, 2000). The action researcher works directly and collaboratively with those who experience difficulties in problem identification

and knowledge generation processes. Within an institution of knowledge, action learning research might be the preferred method; action without learning is unlikely to provide rewarding longer term results, while learning without action cannot facilitate change in the organisation employers and managers (Cho and Egan, 2010). This can be applied to leadership and management, whereby whole system orientated leadership for example, may be better able to encourage employee involvement, enable democracy, and provide conditions for autonomy (Flood, 2000).

Simply standing back and watching the neoliberal transformation of higher education is, according to Levin and Greenwood (2013) a mistake on the part of researchers, as this will simply lead to the increasing commodification of knowledge and the imposition of greater inequalities throughout societies. Insider action research allows members of the organisation to engage with and shape their organisation's future. Insider action research capabilities can be used to study and share new opportunities and confront difficult issues (Coghlan and Brannick, 2005; Coghlan, 2007). I have already explained my involvement in insider collaborative action research project, and how it aims to improve staff experience by removing barriers and creating an environment that promotes staff wellbeing in a sustained and holistic manner. I am also in discussions with researchers involved in action research projects on organisational change outside the institution, and there is potential to take these collaborations forward once my doctorate is completed.

7.7 Summative reflections

In the previous sections, I discussed my outputs so far and how I plan to take my work forward. In this summative section, I reflect on my experiences of conducting autoethnography, and working with colleagues within my own institution. In ethnography, it is not expected that the researcher is an expert in their chosen study field, but rather sets out to discover this social world through first hand observation and participation in 'natural' settings (Wolcott, 2008). The researcher exploring within their own institution can find themselves in a 'space between' (Corbin Dwyer

and Buckle, 2009) insider and observer. By removing the contrived dichotomy between the two states that a more positive methodology might produce, I found that autoethnography, more than any other qualitative methodology I have previously used, lessened this sense of duality. Nevertheless, there were times when I suffered from a sense of alienation and aloneness, and have discussed these feelings in the first part of my findings (e.g. see page125). Some of this I can attribute to my lack of prior experience of negotiating this particular environment. At the start of this project, my understanding of the world of staff learning and development was very limited and not entirely accurate. For example, I had little idea about the management of LDPs and how they fitted in with the overall aims and strategies of senior management within HR divisions and the faculties. In my role as ethnographer, I felt that investigating these management processes in too much depth, in advance of other fieldwork, could influence my judgments, whereas in the spirit of open mindedness I wished to approach my field and actors from an embodied perspective (Okely, 2007). At the same time, I wanted avoid a one sided perspective and to faithfully represent all parties with personal and professional investments in learning and development.

Another factor concerns the nature of the modern society including my working environment and the paradoxical values it appears to promote. As social animals, we are faced with these two conflicting wants, the desire to be recognised and respected as an individual and a craving to belong, to be emotionally connected to, to be subsumed, into groups and social worlds. These two human needs have informed political and social governance, and its symbols and rituals, throughout recorded history. I suggest that, under the influence of neoliberalism in contemporary western society, the ethos of self-governance and self-conscious prevails at the expense of collective sentiment. I, along with others I suspect, have grown suspicious of some attempts to create collective sentiments in an unstable workplace. At the same time, I am likely to continue to seek the ‘golden glow’, *communitas* and emotional energy and sense of higher purpose, which spontaneously arises during successful interaction rituals, and which is part of the attraction of participation on LDPs.

Locating the research field within my workplace was familiar and convenient, however these benefits had to be weighed up against the considerable ethical, political and emotional challenges it presented to me as doctoral researcher (Coghlan 2007; Mercer 2007; Holian and Coghlan 2013; Floyd and Arthur 2012). Universities are political, hierarchical and compartmentalised arenas, and while my supervisors largely approved of my approach, they were initially cautious about my negotiating this prickly and changeable terrain. As Doloriort and Sambrook discovered when acting as student and supervisor for an autoethnographic PhD, negotiating one's way around traditional HE cultures and structures can be a challenge in itself (Doloriort and Sambrook 2011). In many ways, my position as a part time academic with a limited sphere of influence within the university afforded me the advantage of relative invisibility. Assuming a grassroots perspective also allowed me to draw on existing person-centred skills to establish trust and respect with managers and other stakeholders and thereby gain access into conversations and areas might otherwise be closed to me. Studies within organisations tend towards the more mechanical approach with priority given to measuring efficiency and effectiveness, whereas ethnography can provide an emotionally sensitive and aesthetic perspective (Kenny 2008) around embodied experience in an organisational context. By assuming an autoethnographic perspective, I could act as both participant and interpreter for this emotionally rich and relatively uncharted area of contemporary working life.

From a doctoral researcher's perspective, part of 'what is in it for me?' included obtaining qualifications, as well as endeavouring to change my own, and the organisational, work practices (Holian and Coghlan, 2013). In addition to improving my general work performance within the university, a number of planned and incidental outcomes also arose from this study. Full participation on some courses presented me with excellent opportunities to 'work on' and reflect on myself as a person but also my agency and role within the organisation. My data collection came at a time when some weighty change initiatives were underway within the university. Trying to keeping abreast of these changes and to make meaningful contributions to them as a part time member of staff can be difficult but was made easier through my

participation on LDPs, and the conversations they generated between staff, during and after these events. Undertaking work ‘on the ground’ during a time of substantive change also proved to be advantageous in that, in order to prepare staff for these changes, there were multiple learning and training events taking place across the institution. This allowed me to experience for myself the rolling out of new initiatives and, in my role as ethnographer, record their effects on staff at first hand. In addition, attendance at the events had learning and cathartic benefits; these were good opportunities to listen and learn from others, but also to share my feelings and experiences with colleagues.

Both performance and embodiment have been recurring themes in this work, and at the heart of this study has been my co-presence as a performer (Spry, 2007) in different social worlds. I sought to use my physical co-presence as a means of feeling my way ‘into the hidden crevices’(Labaree, 2002. p2), and exploring the complexity of different social worlds, without unduly altering the natural dynamic between actors in a social world. I remained mindful however that, as an autoethnographer, the culture in which these experiences occurred remained my primary area of interest and study (Denzin, 2014; Kelley, 2014), and that I was one co-presence in this collective story. Embodied participation in the LDP social world brought with it many affective and social benefits, but also challenges. As an insider I was multitasking and having to test out and refine my technical and social skills and competences as I progressed. Inevitably, I was affected by the highs and lows of work and the impact of the new change agenda, which influenced the extent to which I felt able or willing to fully engage in all the activities on courses. While the relatively discreet and emotionally open nature of LDPs can engender a sense of trust and even intimacy there are limits to which people are prepared to ‘open up’ to others who were still relative strangers (Fixsen *et al.*, 2015). Many LDP activities such as icebreakers, discussion groups, sharing and team work, rely on the establishment of swift trust between temporary groups, and this can be difficult to establish (Meyerson *et al.*, 1996). I entered the LDP social world after a relatively short period of time back at work following

several months through illness, and soon realised that re-establishing my sense of personal safety was a work in progress. Seeing my professional self being made temporarily redundant had been painful and disconcerting, and had left me more than usually alert to any seeming vote of no confidence, even during role-play. In addition, some deeply rooted childhood feelings about rejection and belonging also surfaced for me, in particular when working in the same gender groups, echoing back to playground experiences in my all girls' primary school. Reflecting on and writing about these feelings proved to be helpful in appreciating the potential impact of emotion work on both myself and others who partook in these self-improvement activities, and how these activities need to be supported by skilful facilitation and debriefing.

Among the highs and lows of my time on LDPs, there are a few seminal experiences that stand out. I turned to the concepts emotional energy and emotional entrainment in this study, not only as theoretical platforms, but to express the sense of congruence that I witnessed and experienced during my study of LDP arenas. At its best, this coming together of people with similar intentions was a pivotal moment, alive with possibilities, akin to Durkheim's portrayal of the collective consciousness (Durkheim, 1912), albeit liminal and brief. On a less elevated but still meaningful level, participation provided me with the freedom to engage with fellow participants in diverse and sometimes intimate ways, listen to their stories, learn from them and compare with my own. In the process, I expanded my social and professional network, established friendly work relationships with staff from different sectors and across all levels. Another benefit has been increasing my understanding of general working life within the university. It is rare for an academic to have the opportunity to engage in such an extensive and personal way with staff from corporate services and as to establish a mutual relationship with them. The people I interviewed came from a wide range of work and social backgrounds, expressed a range of viewpoints, including views on about LDP activities or facilitators, and re-emphasised to me the many ways in which similar practices can be perceived. On the other hand, I was struck by some

of the common threads of human experience, for instance through witnessing or hearing about the emotionally cohesive effects of group laughter or tears on an LDP, and the threads created between people through shared emotional energy.

In choosing an autoethnographic methodology for this study, it was in the hope and expectation that what I discovered could be of meaning and value, to both myself and to the organisation. Over the course of my investigations, my 'lens on the world' naturally seemed to alter. I abandoned any conceptual division between a microcosm and macrocosm, and adopted what I saw as the more holistic view of the social world developed by Strauss (1978) and Clarke (1991). Social world theory had its limitations (for example it acknowledges but fails to offer remedies for power inequalities), and this may explain its rather limited application within educational and organisational settings (Clarke, 1991; Eljaer and Huysman, 2008; Strauss, 1978, 1982). This theoretical approach nevertheless provided a framework to explain academically what I had experienced for myself concerning the particular nature of LDPs and the activities taking place within them. Over the course of fieldwork and subsequent analysis, I revisited my findings, in the process re-configuring the complex relationship between my own and others' experiences of learning and development, and the HE work environment in which we operate. For instance, while it was no revelation to me that I was becoming something of a 'course junkie,' I had not fully considered the extent to which commercial and organisational drivers were feeding my comparatively recent compulsion to constantly seek out new skills. Until I embarked on this study, I had studied self-care practices largely from a personal or psychological perspective, without fully locating them within the present day social and economic culture and climate (Foucault, 1989, 1988a). Through this work, I have been able to experience for myself (albeit to a limited extent) how technologies of the self are shaped, function and take on new, sometimes entrepreneurial, meanings, within a contemporary HE context. On the other hand, to assume that all HE staff, including participants featured in this research project, share my personal opinions and concerns about the direction of performance management would be misleading.

As stated in my discussion, both corporate staff and academics enjoyed the entrepreneurial and self-directed aspects of LDPs, albeit to various degrees and for different reasons.

7.7.1 Final thoughts

A rite of passage can be described as a symbolic and emotionally charged event, during which the individual moves from one state and group to another. I consider my transition through the doctoral research process to have been an unprecedented rite of passage in my life, during which I have lost and re-found, or at least redefined, my direction and identity on several occasions. This experience has been all the richer and more insightful as a result of engaging in extensive and self-conscious fieldwork. It has taken me some time and considerable soul-searching to untangle the complex and often ambiguous feelings I experienced during and subsequent my fieldwork. I would hesitate to call any one LDP personally transforming, however reflectively participating in different programmes encouraged me to explore my own self-consciousness, to question my personal preferences and prejudices and examine my own belief systems (Lievens *et al.*, 2008) in a more critical and politically nuanced manner.

While I have enjoyed my time on LDPs this has not been without reservations. I found the format of these programmes somewhat repetitive and lacking in variety. On the other hand I met some very pleasant people and also made some useful contacts. I felt supported in a way that I find very touching. I hope that I gave back some emotional support in return. As a result of participating I have learnt things about myself including my problems with assertiveness and performing particular tasks in front of others. I have experienced for myself the ‘emotional medley’ produced during group work with others, learned or invented different ways of working and connected with aspects of myself, which had been forgotten, neglected or had recently emerged. For example, realizing my emotional attachment to the traditional values of academic life and my preference for scholarship over entrepreneurship, helps me to appreciate

what I see as my work ethos and ‘mission.’ Undertaking this study has also led me to question my self-development predilection, however this is not a direct criticism of LDPs per se. My findings suggest that face-to-face staff development programmes remain one of the more embodied, communal and enjoyable components of working life, and may help to engender sense of belonging and communal feeling. I, like most human beings, long for that ‘golden glow’ the sense of ‘communitas’, which I experienced, albeit briefly, on some LDPs. However, if I have a major criticism with the programmes it is the lack of guidance on how participants can process any distressing emotions arising from emotive activities and self-reflection. I know there were times when people felt emotional and I wonder how they could have been supported in this.

In terms of staff wellbeing, I am left with many concerns about the future direction of universities, however this is not a direct criticism of self-care ideological beliefs and ethical practises per se. Concepts of self-development have coloured many of the personal and career decisions I have made in my life, and I remain convinced that the practice of self-care and self-development can render both society and organisations better places in which to live and work. However, in both my literature review and discussion, I have made much of the problems created by excessive managerialism in HE, and the increasing emphasis on self-responsibility over and above social care in neoliberal organisations. A surfeit of self-examination practices is, in my opinion, not only increasing the workloads of already over-extended staff, but devaluing the true meaning of self-care, while diverting attention from more pressing needs for strategic re-evaluation within universities, ultimately for their own survival as distinct cultural and pedagogic entities (Greenwood and Levin, 2001; Levin and Greenwood, 2013). This viewpoint reflects my own ontological and political position but has nevertheless been reinforced by my ethnographic investigations. While I appreciate the limitations of lone ethnography in terms of what I could immediately achieve, I have few regrets about my choice of topic, or my choice of methods for this study. In addition to the substantial pedagogic skills acquired through my research process, I have met and

worked with some wonderful people, and participated in a whole range of edifying and entertaining activities. I feel indebted to participants and facilitators for their contributions to this work and for what they have shared with me about their working lives, including their hopes and aspirations. The final verdict on the validity and authenticity of this work lies with my readers (Kelley, 2014), and their empathy with what I have attempted to convey (Ellis, 2009). In the final section, my epilogue, I consider what I consider to be if not the denouement, then a seminal 'rite' in my doctoral passage - my viva voce.

7.7.2 Epilogue

We are discussing my upcoming viva. Just imagine your audience is naked, my husband suggests. Is that supposed to make me feel better? It raises a chuckle at least. The mock viva took place a fortnight ago and I was ill prepared for it. I arrived late due to train problems and ran through the streets of London in the pouring rain, only to discover that the recently installed, state-of-the-art AV system had broken down in the allocated room. I was offered an alternative room, into which myself, and my obliging audience of three, moved with our sodden coats and dripping umbrellas. This time the slideshow worked at least, but my presentation was so long that the important points raised at the end had to be omitted. The 'examiners'' feedback was gentle, but sufficiently honest and critical to leave me with a strong sense of inner doubt. Arriving home that evening I dramatically set out my prediction of failure to my husband, leaving us both with a temporary sense of grief over three potentially wasted years. A brief chat with my eminently sensible younger son brought me back to my senses, and after a good night's sleep I felt determined to prove my work to be, if not perfect, at least sufficiently robust and unique to earn me my sought after doctoral award.

So, here I am the night before the viva. I am at peace in the sense that I have done all I can at this point to prepare for the big day. I have swotted up on

every theory, methodology and author that I have namedropped in my work, realising once again how much my attempt to include the kitchen sink has made hard work for me. The morning sees me mildly nervous, but alert and ready to face my critical audience. Once again, there are problems with the train but I use this extra time to review my now thoroughly prepared slideshow. On arrival I'm greeted by two of my advisory team, and realising that it is a big day for them too, feel a wave of empathy. After all, nobody likes to be put on the line. After half an hour of waiting we are called into the room. Walking down the corridor I pull my back up straight, and resolve to 'sock it to them.' We all shake hands and then I begin. My presentation goes better than the rehearsals. Having a real audience brings out the performer in me, and I even manage to ignore the concentrated expressions on my examiners' faces as they follow my slides. Usually I manage to throw in a light joke or two, this time I stick closely to my script. After the presentation come the questions. As we sit round the table, the friendly smile of the chair provides some sense of comfort. The first question is easy, what made me decide to do this project. 'It's a culmination of a lifetime', I say, 'so this might be a long story.' They seem satisfied with this answer, but slowly the questions become trickier and the critique begins. Why did I put my questions where I did? What's my understanding of autoethnography?

After an hour of discussion, my supervisors and I are invited to leave the room. The atmosphere between us is mildly tense as we consider the comments raised by the externals. I walk back like a prisoner awaiting my sentence, but strangely calm and resigned. The chair wastes no time in telling me that I've got my award subject to revisions within three months. I feel a huge weight fall away from me. There are smiles and congratulations, and then the chair asks us all out for lunch. Suddenly I'm ravenously hungry, although I haven't thought about food until now. After the meal, I feel a strong need to share my good news. Nothing prepared me for the questions they asked, and there's a

bit more to do, but I'm starting to believe that the hard work may have paid off.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Participant Information sheet

INFORMATION SHEET FOR INTERVIEW VOLUNTEERS:

Title of Study: Feeling our way: An investigation of university staff experiences of participation in personal and professional development programmes of the 'soft skills' variety.

Lead Researcher: Alison Fixsen

Dear Colleague,

My name is Alison Fixsen and I work as senior lecturer in the Department of Complementary Medicine at the University of Westminster. I am currently working toward a Professional Doctorate in Education. As part of this research I will be interviewing members of staff about their experiences of participating in learning and development or Leadership and development courses or workshops. This information sheet provides you with details about the research I will be conducting. Please read it carefully and feel free to ask me any questions, or to explain any points on the sheet, before you decide to take part. My email address is A.Fixsen@wmin.ac.uk

What is the purpose of the study?

For this project I will be investigating my own and other staff members' experiences of participating in staff programmes that encourage the development of 'soft skills'. The term soft skills refers to interpersonal and personal attributes/ skills (and other generic skills) that someone possesses or has acquired (Boyce *et al.*, 2001). These skills are now regarded as important for career progression (Musa *et al.*, 2012) and also for individual and organisational 'wellbeing.' This is a growing area of research, but so far no studies have looked at the experiences of university staff that have participated in this type of personal and professional development programme.

Why have I been invited to participate?

You have been asked to participate because you have some personal experience of participating in one or more staff learning and development or leadership and management programme at the University of Westminster. Whatever your experiences they are relevant to this study as we are not seeking any particular answers.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to go ahead, you will be given this information sheet to keep and a consent form to sign. Even if you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

What will participation involve?

I would like you to participate in one semi structured interview. The interview process will be conducted in complete privacy, in a room within the University, and at a time and date that is convenient for you. It will last about 45 minutes. Before it begins I will explain the study again and you will be given a consent form. This form will be

signed if you agree to take part. You will also be given a copy of the consent form to keep.

During the interview, I will be taking notes, and the interview will also be audio taped with your permission. It will be suggested to you that you try not to use real names to help maintain confidentiality. You can keep out of the interview anything that you do not want to talk about, or you can stop the interview at any time without giving any reason at all.

Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?

All names of people and places will be removed from the typed up interview. Only myself, or a professional typist, will type up your interview, and they will sign an agreement to keep your interview confidential, and not talk to anyone about it. If the study is published the data will be presented in a way that participants cannot be identified by others.

Only my two supervisors and myself will have access to the interview notes. You will be sent a copy of your interview transcript via a password protected email word document to review before it is used. All data will be stored in a secure, locked cabinet. The recorded interview and interview transcripts will be destroyed no longer than 5 years after the interview.

Are there any disadvantages to taking part?

There will be no disadvantages to you as a staff member in taking part. However there is the time involved, and talking about yourself may bring up feelings for you. I will also ask about how you are feeling after the interview, and you can email or phone me, or my supervisors if you have any questions or concerns. After the interview I will pass on a list of useful contacts that can be used to get more help if any personal issues come up that you would like to discuss further. I will also contact you a few days after the interview to check that you feel okay.

Will I receive anything in return?

Hopefully the interview will be an interesting experience for you. I will offer you feedback at the end if you would like it.

What should I do if I want to take part?

Contact me by email and or complete the attached consent form and return it to me in the stamped addressed envelope. I will contact you shortly after I receive it to arrange a suitable interview time and date.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

All information on you will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office at the University of Westminster, and destroyed within 5 years of the study. All electronic information will be password protected and kept securely also. The information from the study will be later published in paper and may be presented at a conference. If you withdraw from the study, which you can do at any time before the research is finalised, all information about you will be destroyed

All data use is strictly within the terms of the Data Protection Act (DPA 1998). Only short quotes (where the person cannot be identified) will be used in any paper, public presentations, or other publications about the project.

Who will review the study?

Dr. Steven Cranfield and Professor Damien Ridge will be reviewing and supervising this work at each stage. You can also contact either of them if you wish to make a comment or complaint (see contact details below).

Complaints

If myself or either of my supervisors fail to satisfy you about a complaint you have made please contact -----from the Ethics Committee.

Alison Fixsen - A.Fixsen@westminster.ac.uk or 020 7911 5000 (extension 3812)

Damien Ridge - D.Ridge@wmin.ac.uk

Steven Cranfield- S.Cranfield@westminster.ac.uk

Finally, thank you for reviewing this Information Sheet and I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind Regards,

Appendix 2: Consent form

Project: Feeling our way: An investigation of university staff experiences of participation in personal and professional development programmes of the 'soft skills' variety.

I agree to take part in the above study. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the explanatory sheet "Information for Interview Volunteers", which I may keep for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing:

- To be interviewed by the researcher
- To allow the researcher to record and take notes about the interview

Data

I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party. Only the researcher Alison Fixsen and the supervisor, Dr Damien Ridge, shall have access to typed up notes with identifying information removed. The identifiable data will not be shared with any other organisation. No identifiable personal data will be published.

Protection

I understand that the information I provide will be held and processed for the following purpose:

- To be used in a report and/or in conference reports and/or in publications related to this research.

I agree to University of Westminster keeping and processing this information about me from my interview. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose set out in the explanatory sheet "Information for Interview Volunteers" and my consent is conditional on the University complying with its duties and obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998.

Withdrawal From Study

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without any questions being asked, and without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way by the University of Westminster.

Tape recording the study

I agree that the interviewer may tape record my interview (please tick the box to indicate whether you agree)

Yes ☐

No ☐

Name:

Signature: Date:

Appendix 3: Example transcript

Interviewer: So if you could just very briefly tell me about the area in which you work.

Participant: Right well I am principal lecturer in x, I'm a professional practitioner, x I teach (cut for confidentiality reasons). I'm also a researcher as well (more information

here not included due to poor sound quality)... you know I am a researcher and practitioner, and an academic teacher as well... anything in particular you would like me to talk about?

Not really, it was just to get a general idea of your background and where you work

Yeah, I've been involved in a lot of coaching and development activity in my years at Westminster. And more recently the x. In addition to that I have some degree of collaborative partnership with the corporate HR people because of my occupational psychology background around organisational change and development sort of feeding into those relevant areas, so I think internal consultancy is what it is- I support different parts of the university with coaching and mentoring training. So I have my sort of teaching, and internal academic enterprise activity going on as well.

Ah, you sound very busy

I try to write academic papers in between, but I suppose it keeps me busy yes, it keeps me out of trouble (laughs).

How long have you been working at the University?

About... 15 years

So that's interesting, so you've got, so you have been involved in the electives, not only were you there but you were also involved in the running of the electives- or did I get that wrong?

When you say the electives you mean the recent Learning Futures?

Yes, I do,

Yes well I suppose, since this whole electives proposition came out, I have maintained an interest and I wrote a proposal for the electives, which went to the residential, erm. I'm not quite sure what you want me to say. Erm, so yes, I've been involved in coaching development for the electives... I'm not quite sure what you want..

That's fine. I slightly missed understood what you said there because, you were involved in the electives in terms of developing that particular module. And what were overall experiences of the residential?

The residential itself was a positive experience, I think there is always feedback you can give to such events, but overall I think the concept of it had a good rationale. Basically to take stuff away, to sort of be more creative, and to select a different environment. I thought the residential raised the status and the importance of the

whole elective curriculum development activity. It was a good opportunity as well to get sort of different ideas from different parts of the University, because it was very mixed attendance-you know an extra opportunity to cross fertilise ideas, and brainstorming and creativity were ignited somewhat through that process. I enjoy the experienced on the whole- it was quite intense, so I think it would've been good to have been are balanced with, interspersed with some time out, no- team time, if you see what I mean just to sort of the assimilate, and that reflection time. Because it was all very intense, and I felt are we were going from one task to another. And they didn't give us individual time, it could have been balanced with a bit of formalised no team time, just to reflect and assimilate on the processes if that makes sense?

Yeah, definitely.

I thought the environment was wonderful. We got a lot done, I think-I've still got to go back to the proposal, it's still not quite finished, so go back to it, BUT just to get those foundation, the foundation content and sort of really think about it, the purpose. And I think you know- It was fun as well. The dragons den type of experience with the students was quite fun. Are it allows you to be a bit creative than you would be in the usual university environment. There was much more fun to it. I think there's a lot of movement in the HR world around game-playing, so it was a different way of learning and thinking about coaching and development through slightly different types of delivery and activity. So overall I really enjoyed it, I'm quite grateful for the University for these activities to take place really, it was quite novel, quite ground-breaking, I've not been made aware of any activities like that before, I've been on these coaching activities before and it was new territory.

So, have you been on other change academy projects, the residentials?

I have actually. I've been to 2 of those residentials as well. What would you like me to say about that?

I just wanted to know your comparisons between the two because I know people were sort of comparing the two when I was there.

Right okay well, so the Change Academy I have been on in 2013, I became the project leader of that one because someone retired. The second one was about wider coaching and mentoring provision, which I went on this year a few weeks before the electives learning futures residential. So how would I compare the two? I think the Change Academy residentials are slightly more corporate lead- very HR lead, to some extent from the organisational development perspective. My head of department is the academic lead on that. They are a slightly more organised type of residential really-I knew you what to expect because I've been on one before. I think the second one- the learning futures- it was a whole new territory, it was very novel, very exciting and there were a lot more academics there I suppose. The constituency of the delegates, whereas the Change Academy was more mix of sort of academic support services so... there's a difference in composition. I think the venues for the electives, for the

learning futures and Change Academy-I think the change Academy this year was probably slightly better than the Learning Futures venue, but you know that's just my choice of building. How else do they differ? I thought I achieved a lot more the Learning Futures residential because it was all down on paper, there was three people on my team, we were much more focused on what we were doing and on specific tasks, very focused tasks.

Sorry... was this the Change academy one, or...

No, this was the Learning Futures residential. It was very focused, you had to fill in the module pro forma so, explicit goals really. Very tangible and measurable goals. We were using google documents, we were all doing it at a time. It was a really good way of working. I think the Change Academy it is a much slower pace, the type of residential, there's more lectures, standing at the front, people talking about what is change, that sort of thing. More creative abstract thinking involved in the Learning Futures. Although the first day was very much-I think it could have been organised differently, there was perhaps too much of staff being lectured to on the first day of the Learning Futures one. All the focus of the work was sort of crammed into the second task. I think the structure could be slightly adjusted. I think that the pace of working was very different. The working in teams was very different. We had about eight people at each table on the Change Academy whereas there were three people, you are working in small groups quite intensively. It was sort of a hothouse sort of environment really. How else would I compare the two? Well they both had very strong after hours social elements, which was quite nice as well, a mix of people from different faculties, erm. I think they could do with the building of informal time out really, you know 'in this hour we want you just to do your own x it's up to you what you do in that hour'. A little bit more of that I think possibly on the Learning Futures one. We had an hour after we had finished a days work to then get ready for dinner, and you know you are sort of back from networking after you finish a days work because you're still talking about work actually because you're still talking about the electives, and university issues. I think individual time or non-work time in between would be quite valuable to that reflection process. So, that would be my main differences.

Urm, can you think of anything particularly in terms of Learning future residential that you particularly gained from it is? That stands out for you?

I think- oh gosh-the opportunity to- the cross-disciplinary activity was valuable, and I would encourage more of that and I knew about other electives that overlapped, but I think it could be more activities more tapping into the different teams progress or a progress element. Erm, the positives that stand out-I think just the intensity, the amount of work that we got done in that amount of time, the quantity of work was quite a lot, it was quite impressive-I think it could've been more if it are been structured differently. What else stands out? The energy in the room, the positivity, the sort of being away from the University, the energy, the synergy, the potential

synergy of working in different teams, and meeting other small teams as well I think stand out. And the positivity of the whole event-although there were some sort of moans and gripes from team members at times, but on the whole definitely the positivity of the experience. I'm not sure this is what you're wanting to hear?

This is perfect thank you. What about the dialogue that was going on?

Well, it was sort of free-flow really, there were no sort of boundaries. Being away from University culture and environment there was so much more liberal and free dialogue I think. And much more sharing and cooperation, perhaps. Maybe less guarded- you know within the university maybe there's a certain culture that can potentially inhibit creativity of coaching and development activities. I think you get more- less boundaries to dialogue-people are less inhibited, they talk about different things, is more opportunity to speak about different things, from a different view, to exchange their views in a different environment- that gives you the freedom of speech I think. Slightly more freedom of speech than within the University, when people might be less likely to speak up thinking 'oh I might upset apple-cart'. You know the environment away from the university it so much more freedom of speech, I'm not sure if I said anything different than I would at the University, but it was an easier dialogue, dialogue free from cultural norms and values, an opportunity to explore differences in dialogue as well I think.

Mmm, sorry I am taking a few notes at the same time

No that's fine... time to pause and tease out deep thoughts that I'm having about the electives. It's a few weeks ago now, and it was really hot, I remember the Wednesday was so hot I didn't sleep very well, I couldn't open windows. You know the venue was very much within their sort of range, but you were able to get on with the work. I think the environment-the environment is very important for stimulating creativity having an open environment helped to be more positive, it could affect your mood, I think the research (inaudible) but overall it sort of enhances the mood and feel, and you know I think we were told that the University had invested a lot of money in that residential and taking us away, so we were sort of a primed about the importance of the prestige and status of the event, it hasn't happened before. It did feel very different very exciting and very different. To go away, to develop an elective, our module-you know it's not even a core course module, you know that says a lot about what the University, the importance the University places on the electives really. And the message that is trying to portray about the importance of those electives. They want really a strong cohort, a strong rationale for the developmental electives. Change academy residentials I would say they're much more formal, much more corporate lead, there are creative activities going on, but a lot of the work happens in the workplace when you get back into university. So it is a residential that allows thinking around the project. I think it needs to be balanced up with some similar maybe Away days within University as part of that year of the project. But that's some kind of taking teams to an away day, to work on the program and give updates, I think would

be quite useful. I think that's about the electives as well. I think it would be good to have a sort of-we have to have the electives pro forma written to early September-it would perhaps still have been nice to have had a different date, an ending bringing it to close. We had a big celebratory start and it will be good to have an ending to that in way or maybe that will come later, perhaps when they are all validated there might be thank you and didn't you do well and sort of a celebratory event. So, it's balancing the opening work with the rounding finishing up of the whole event in itself. Do you know what I'm saying?

Yes I do

We had a big bang in the beginning, and then all sort of fizzled out. It will be good to have another big bang-what just another event to bring everyone back together, sort of celebrate the Projects' achievements. So very much about gestalt, closing the cycle of experience really. I think that's what's missing from change academy really. you have a project team and you feedback at the leadership forum, it would be good to get all those people back together, erm just bring it to a close formally.

Mmm. Cos what you were saying about energy- you know the Amount of energy that was being generated, and the networking that was going on-do you want to say bit more about the networking?

Yeah, let me see-it was sort of like blowing up a balloon, you know you all sort of get deflated a little bit, you kind of lose that momentum when you're back in the workplace. Going back to sort of networking-I think a lot of it was quite informal and after the event had taken place, because the days were very tied, and you're in your little teams and you have specific activities, and I think it was all left to evening and dinner, following dinner and after dinner was the opportunities, the main time to undertake any networking. It wasn't really-you know by that time you're quite exhausted and you're chatting about not necessarily work things anyway, so might be good to build in specific times, opportunities to meet with the project team informally, just chatting. Sort of Afternoon tea, you know. There was some of it I think that probably could've been more. Did I-I think I was just too tired by the end of the day, I'd been working with my small team and so I think I was just chatting generally. The networking, the serious of networking which is about exploring are further collaborative projects, there wasn't really the energy and time to do that there. So some of it might have happened, you know I think for me 20% networking in the evening, but not too great amount. I was more relaxing and having downtime, talking about the weather and holidays, rather than trying to work together and how can we work forward altogether. I do some of that because I are specifically joined the team time work with another team with a comparable similar module. I went over to them and said it would be good to have catch up and touch base with each other maybe not even at the electives but another time, because we were doing similar style modules, the suggestion was that we could LinkedIn modules together and they could become part of a Westminster extra tidemark package, it was that kind of discussion really.

That's as far-did I do any other networking? No I was too focused on the pro forma to think about other projects that might come out of this really. So there was the liberal free speech around the pro forma it was all about the pro forma and getting it out really rather than the secondary outcomes. When I look at it analytically. But potentially it could be development, you know the purpose of the residential was all about coaching and development, I think it has to be networking formally, are putting that in an outcome of the residential, it would have to be built in slightly more formally. But was just good to hear what people we're doing, compared different work life, those kind of conversations, who has got HEF ? and who hasn't. You know what changes have you had, what's going on in the business school. So you can compare notes and work satisfaction against people from different faculties. That was the extent of the networking I did in a way. Although others may report very different types of experiences. Are you know I was quite tired at the end of day, so. Just had some General informal chats which was quite nice, quite a release in a way after the intensity of and concentration involved in thinking about trying to balance all the needs of the development over the distinctiveness and graduate attributes, and how it was going to be attractive to students, the selling points. so you know after all that thinking and reflecting it was just nice to talk about non-work things in the evening if I'm honest. Some networking but not is not around now as I expected or-I'm not sure what I expected really because it's the first time, this sort of residential, so that's all I can say about the networking really. Maybe if I did another one I would be more strategic, 'I want to talk to this person, I want to talk to that person, or'. I didn't-there was no pre-reading attached to the elective other than had to think about coaching, I had to think about the subject coaching and mentoring, get the relevant documents together, Think about what will be good as part of this module, what other institutions are doing. You know it wasn't about, right networking. It wasn't the main focus of any preparation but I did, it wasn't the purpose of the electives, so. Not a lot of it necessarily emerged.

Yeah, yeah, actually some of what I'm looking that is some of the sort of hidden stuff that is going on as well, so that's why asked about networking. I'm aware that it wasn't, you know there wasn't really a particularly formal part to the networking. The incidental learning is what I'm interested in.

Oh okay. Yes, I did talk to- it was quite closed to groups in a way. My approach to it - I was very much focused on the team and whether they were happy, whether we were working effectively together, putting down on paper, I did have conversations with different people we talked about-I'm trying to remember what we talked about Actually. Just general catching up with colleagues you know, in my department who I haven't seen, so was an opportunity to just in a way incidental, the non work staff what is the me personally it was good to catch up with a couple of people. You know you are so busy ordinarily, you need to have our qualitative, bonding type of conversations actually. I would say. Plus to make a few new friends, to get to know the colleagues I am working with a little bit more closely, more intimately. So I think it's about bonding and affiliation and about the very basics of a good team-when I

think about the change Academy project a little bit now, but you know to have really spent time developing a team-it's only a team of three-and change academy again, maybe it's about the team, the team working. You know I think the university because of different changes over the years, we can lose the essence of what good working is, which is about team structures and relationships and communication. Having work colleagues were there with you 24 hours a day pretty much is a novelty, it's very different you know-I've heard people comment that, in the business school you know that it's a commuter University-people go in, do their teaching and then they just go home. And I think I've seen that more recently in the Departmental change. Going from one department which is well-established to are a newer more eclectic mix of people really. I am so I think me personally it was just really nice to have time out, time with different colleagues in my department, and that was one thing just had time to talk to them and catch up, without having to dash off to do some meetings or something like that, and also to get to know some other people who I might be, you know correspond with, form potential working relationships with. So I think it's all about the quality, building on the quality of your relationships, rather than quantity to networking, it's more about investing time in perhaps some of the relationships I have, or you might have in the workplace, just to sort of invest time in those. Appreciative of your similarities and differences. So that's quite good, I got to know a couple of people on the change academy projects, I got know and is understand where they are coming from, whether their vision is. So yes I think team bonding, developing relationships, close working relationships, intimacy in relationships, was quite an important part of it.

Mmm.

Well that's how I'd put it anyway. Quality time to invest in personal relationships is much harder in university environment because everyone is so busy, you're going to one person to the next, you might have lunch, so you know that quality of spending time and having a bit of a team bonding, team building activity really to go back to the old days, I think that perhaps-well it's something I'll be recommending regarding the course leadership, just go back to the different team building and working in teams. Strong teams are the crux of good Staff satisfaction scores and that reflects on student satisfaction I think. Some of that exists-I think there could be a lot more done in place for the really large modules, you know just to go back to team building the importance of that has really been lost I would say in recent years, I would say. They can be a lot more done in working with that so. To improve student satisfaction, and staff satisfaction really. Okay, are your other interviews like this, how am I comparing with your other interviewees?

How are you comparing? I suppose over time, because I've interviewed about 17 or 18 people now, across academics and non-academics, so I suppose now I'm asking more, slightly more directed questions, based on what's coming out a Little bit. My interest really which is in, as I say, I was finding it hard to

articulate but, now I'm realising it is about the incidental things that happen as well, and as you were saying the bonding, those quality-

You? Yes absolutely and when I sort of think about it slightly deeper and reflect back on what I did, we did some good work, I did learn things I look a little bit more technology related software, so add there was a bit of learning, the curriculum- the module was developed, there are a few techy skills as well, I think it was just really good to get to know people a bit better as well, and work really closely, intensively with individuals. Is I think goes on in the corporate sector, the money sector, project teams come together, but it's quite intense working you know that has to be built on very strong bonds really. I think there's a lot more that the University could do around it actually.

What did you think of the Dragons den? Because that was quite a big feature wasn't it?

Well it was fun to be in the students' shoes really. We were like, you know which is only used good teaching students and assessing them, it was really fun to be on the other side of that. Because it does make you, it does remind you the importance of having that feedback in a slightly different form than an evaluation document. I think it was just a license for creativity, I thought really actually. I thought are it could be improved if there were more specific criteria for the students to use really because they were, it was a bit free flowing really but it was supposed to be fun and the students are giving feedback, I think they could have been a lot more done to structure that feedback, around the criteria perhaps. But if it was just a fun activity in itself about the creativity doing something differently-it depends what the purpose was- if it was really about the feedback, I think perhaps they could be more around the whole feedback, but I enjoyed it, and I felt it would be useful experience, it was the first time that I had ever done that sort of thing but I would be happy to do it again to sort of be assessed by students. Being co-creators to go back to the philosophy of the whole Learning futures thing.

Mmm. How did it effect your relationship within the group, in terms of the fact that we were sort of performing in someways, weren't we?

How did it affect us? It didn't really, we just carried on with our tasks. Because it was just light-hearted feedback-I can't remember-we did sort of look at it in then we just got down to-it didn't really have a big impact-we did look at it, it did feed into the process. It didn't affect or hinder the synergy.

I meant to particularly in the morning when we were having to work through to a deadline. Because it because you know we had like 2 to 3 hours to get to a certain point, to-

I don't think we did though. I think most teams were kind of 85% there. I know we have not quite finished our proposal. Ahh, I can't remember, the end was all a bit-

there was no formal feedback process, but I can't remember-you know what I can't remember! I know at the end we had to do the proposal, and there was some general question and answer session I think. But I don't think it did affect-we just kept kind of working and trying to get the proposal done- we've got most sections filled in. I think you know I've got to go back to it and do some work on it, so. Add I think that Dragon's Den I think was-are there were issues around the timing. It was a very exhausting afternoon I remember that. And there were issues around timing. I think the shorter more structured feedback session to keep the synergy, the flow. It all became a bit of a resilience test really I think on that second day. It was still fun and creative and I enjoyed doing it. I remember feeling are very tired, is going on and on, and it was after lunchtime wasn't it? Energy dips then anyway. I think it would be good to do that again in a more structured, reduced time environment may be splitting the group in half, having two separate dragons dens going on. Maybe reducing the time a little bit, so they had some more reflective creative tasks to think about and build very structured feedback into the process. It was a bit, the seriousness of the feedback was lost a little bit for me. Because there was a lot of repetition.. I don't know. We did look at it and read through it, and consider it. The outcome could have been something with more rigourous detail, structured and specific feedback perhaps on reflection.

That's great, I'm just aware that I've taken up 40 minutes of your time. is there anything else you wanted to comment on from what we've been talking about?

No, well what do you think, obviously this is your qualitative data for your prof Doc, are you going to be feeding this back in a different way as well?

Oh yes I have to do, the whole thing about the prof doc is that there have to be some kind of outputs to this, it's not like doing a PhD where you just write it up. There are I'm going to be feeding it back certainly to HR, but I am happy to feed it back to you and your team as well. I'm going to be writing papers on I different types of papers.

Appendix 4: Extract of Paper submitted to Studies in Continuing Education

Self-care and entrepreneurship: Revisiting soft skills learning and development for staff through ethnography.

Introduction

In this paper, we report on our observations and experiences with continuing professional and educational programmes for staff working in a higher education institution in the UK. These programmes, in common with others across the sector and internationally, are driven in large part by economic and structural changes in society. Our exploration focuses in particular on the comparatively under-researched area of soft skills development as a paradigmatic instance of changes in the values, purposes and methods of continuing education programmes for public sector professionals. Soft skills' can be described as personal and professional attributes, which complement discipline-specific skills and help individuals to successfully navigate the requirements, challenges and opportunities of their job role in pursuit of personal, team or individual goals (Heckman and Kautz 2012; McGurk 2010). These programmes are subject to routine evaluations however they have rarely been explored through ethnography.

Fundamental questions can be asked concerning the nature of these programmes and their meaning for participants, such as in what ways might they reflect or help to shape modern workplace identities? Where higher education (HE) is concerned, to what extent do they assist staff members in their physical and emotional navigation through an increasingly entrepreneurial HE environment or simply seduce them into participating in further neoliberal exercises in performativity? Training programmes featuring soft skills are, after all, big business; self-improvement, which includes soft skills training provided through motivational speaking and coaching,

represents a \$10 billion per year industry in the US alone (Marketdata Enterprises 2012).

To answer our inquiries, we draw on field data from an ethnographic study of staff soft skills learning and development programmes (LDPs) within a UK university, which included participation on programmes and 25 interviews with staff from both academic and corporate service sectors. Focusing on LDPs featuring a high degree of face-to-face contact, and drawing on social world theory (Clarke 1991; Strauss 1978), we consider the ways in which LDPs promote both informal learning and self-governance, drawing attention to the problems around performing authentically in a social world in which the meaning of both ‘self-care’ and ‘performance’ have become ambiguous.

Appendix 5: Extract from Journal of Contemporary Ethnography paper

‘Performance and rites of passage through staff development programs: an autoethnography

Prelude

Girl in a room asks, “Why am I here?” I feel a bit old and shy. Adele playing in the background . . . am I the only academic here? I spot a couple of familiar faces; otherwise it is a room full of women – many ages and ethnicities, now starting to talk a little to each other. I’m conscious that the facilitators know I am a researcher. Will they be watching me taking notes?

Introduction

Despite the ubiquity of staff development programs, few studies have explored the experiences of participants who elect to attend such courses for their own personal and professional development from an ethnographic perspective (Peck et al. 2000; Carroll, Iedema, and Kerridge 2008). In this paper, I consider how, as part of a professional doctorate, I positioned myself as participant and autoethnographer in a series of soft skills learning and development programs (LDPs) provided for staff within a university. By LDPs, I refer to programs that feature a high degree of face-to-face or “embodied learning” activities. Drawing on conceptualizations of “embodied” group feeling such as “collective effervescence” (Durkheim 1912) and “communitas” (Turner, 1979; 1985; Turner, 2012), I interpret the LDP “social world” as an embodied space in which participants engage in a series of rituals associated with self-improvement and career progression. I explore my passage through the LDP social world and the part it played in the rite of passage that constitutes my doctoral progression. In a society in which communication within the workplace has become increasingly disembodied and relationships within, and with, the institution more uncertain, I ask if the main attraction of soft skills LDPs lies less in the skills that people acquire during their time on these courses, and more in the temporary sense of intimacy and communal sentiment that LDPs attempt to foster. In the following section, I consider the rising importance of soft skills in contemporary western culture and its association with positive psychology discourses and with the demands imposed by neoliberal policies on staff working in the higher education (HE) sector.

Literature review

The term “soft skills” broadly refers to a generic set of non-technical interpersonal, people or behavioural skills believed to help individuals better navigate the modern workplace in pursuit of personal, team or organizational goals (Weber et al. 2013; McGurk 2010). Over the last few decades, the importance of soft skills for both staff and students has been increasingly emphasized (Kermis and Kermis, 2011; Kyllonen, 2013; Development Economics, 2015), including within universities (Williams 2015; Junrat et al. 2014). A vast health literature has grown out the therapeutic side of the soft skills “culture” with companies making millions from selling literature and programs based on popular theories (Furedi 2004; Development Economics 2015; Stevenson and Starkweather 2010), such as resilience (Schneider, Lyons, and Khazon 2013), assertiveness training (Ames and Flynn, 2007), leadership skills (Walia and Marks-Maran 2014), mindfulness (Van Gordon et al. 2016), and more. Why and when the explosion of interest in soft skills emerged is harder to explain, but may have much to do with the influence of positive psychology in education and industry. Building on the pioneering work of Marty Seligman (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000), different versions of the positive psychological approach have emerged, which are marketed as sound “investments,” with direct economic benefits to both employees and company (Bakker and Schaufeli 2008). These types of models are incorporated into personal and professional development programmes, and encourage a less problem-focused approach to personal development and stress management.

Positivity, at first glance, offers a seductive discourse (Fineman 2006), a vision of “the sunnier side of life” (270), with the potential to be used for the good of individual, institution and wider society. At the same time, popularist “gurus” and writers on positivity can be criticised for the bold and largely unreferenced statements they make to sell their products (Fineman, 2006). Positivity and competency discourses can also be critiqued for largely ignoring issues of political and economic power, and for the privileging of particular modes of functioning, strengths and virtues (McDonald and O’Callaghan 2008). Universities have not been exempt from this positivist trend, or its critics (Ecclestone and Hayes 2008; Watson 2009). Writing on the state of happiness (or unhappiness) in today’s UK universities, Watson (2009)

considers the moral right to be unhappy, or at least to opt out of any officially prescribed version of happiness (17-22), while Ecclestone and Hayes (2008) lament the “dangerous rise of therapeutic education.”

Appendix 6: Extract from HRM/ OD&W report

A summary report of Professional Doctorate study carried out from 2014-16

‘Feeling Our Way’: An investigation of university staff experiences of ‘soft skills’ learning and development programmes

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Aims of study

The aim of this study was to investigate the experiences, perceptions and feelings of staff members (including myself) from across the university, who participated in learning and development programmes (LDPs), which emphasise personal and interpersonal attributes, or 'soft', skills. My purpose was not to evaluate these experience or the courses themselves, but to understand and interpret contemporary learning and development programmes from a grass roots perspective. Drawing on social interaction theory, I focused on the experiential side of learning and development within face-to-face contexts, and in particular learning activities involving group interaction and personal disclosure. The key areas of my investigation and study findings are described in this report.

Study background

The staff learning and development programmes (LDPs) explored in this study focused on personal and professional attributes and competences sometimes referred to as 'soft skills.' Various definitions of soft skills can be found (Schulz, 2008; Mitchell *et al.*, 2010; Robles, 2012a), however a defining feature is an emphasis on the individual's ability to work more effectively, independently and with others, within the workplace. The terms skills and competences are often used in similar contexts (Boyatzis, 1982; Goleman, 1999), but need to be distinguished. In a professional context, Boyatzis (1982) defines competencies as those characteristics of a person that are causally related to effective and/or superior performance (p23). Soft skills and competences can be developed through E-learning, however as many of these skills are associated with the interpersonal, they are most effectively developed and practised in groups, through discussion, case studies, games and role-play (Wats, 2009; Hromek and Roffey, 2009).

The increasing focus on developing soft skills has happened at a time of ever-accelerating change within the organisations, including within HE. As universities are increasing subject to competition and market pressures, and staff budgets increasingly stretched, HE institutions have come under pressure to train and up-skill existing staff to keep abreast of changes, at same time hopefully benefiting from a more skilled, motivated and emotionally resilient workforce. What is sometimes referred to as the 'soft stuff' of management (good people management) can be seen as the most effective way of stimulating innovation and building competitive advantage, through employee engagement (Knight, 2011, p40). From the organisational perspective of improving employee attitudes and productivity, staff development initiatives that utilise positively oriented human resource strategies aimed at enhancing staff wellbeing may be more effective than initiatives directed towards performance targets (Baptiste, 2008; Day and Gu, 2007).

Developing a staff body with suitable personal and interpersonal skills and competences is an integral part of the present organisational development at University. Staff learning and development programmes (LDPs) featuring personal and interpersonal skills, or 'soft skills, ' have become a ubiquitous and accepted presence in UK universities, and take up a substantial part of the HR strategy and budget. The Westminster 2020 People Strategy: Valuing Our Staff Experience states the university's commitment to 'enabling and empowering staff to grow through a high-quality staff experience and to 'proactively developing and supporting staff to realise their full potential in a collaborative, open, equitable and respectful working culture' (Harrison and Barratt, 2015).

Appendix 7: Table 8: Summary of main ethnographic fieldwork

Summary of fieldwork: 2014- 2015		No participants (approx.)	Length of programme
May 2014	Attendance on sociodrama workshop (autoethnography)	8 participants	4 hours
June 2014	Attendance on resilience workshop (autoethnography)	12 participants	1 day
June 2014	Attendance on communication skills	14 participants	1 day

	workshop (autoethnography)		
May 2014	Attendance on gender specific personal and professional development course (autoethnography)	35 participants	4 days over 10 weeks
15/12/14	Email and participant information sheet sent to participants on gender specific personal and professional development course	35 participants	
Jan- Feb 2015:	Semi structured interviews 1-5 -gender specific personal and professional development course	5 separate interviews	1 hour each
Feb- April 2015	Attended coaching course taught element (autethnographic)	12 participants	12 days over 3 months
April 2015	Meeting with HR managers	2 stakeholders	2 hours
April 2015	Meeting with HR manager re recruitment of participants	1 manager	1 hour
14/04/15	Email and participant information sheet sent to leadership courses		
5/05/15	Meeting with stakeholder in coaching	1 participant	1 hour
26/05/15	Meeting with stakeholder in mentoring	1 participant	1 hour
9/06/15	Interview 6 (M)- mixed gender leadership course	1 participant	1 hour
10/06/15	Email and participation info sent to participants of coaching course		
16/06/16	Interview 7 (F) women researcher course	1 participant	1 hour
18/06/15	Participant observation: Mixed gender leadership programme	15 participants	4 hours
22/06/15:	Interview 8 (F) Academic researcher	1 participant	1 hour
23/06/15:	Interview 9 (F) leadership course for women	1 participant	1 hour
23/06/15	Interview 10 (F) leadership course for women	1 participant	1 hour
1-3th Jul 15	Attendance on interdepartmental residential (autoethnography)	30 participants	3 days

3/7/15	Interview 11 (coaching; gender specific personal and professional development course)	1 participant	1 hour
7/07/15 AM	Interview 12 (F) coaching; Interview 13 (F) women researcher course	2 participants interviewed separately	1 hour each
7/07/15 PM	Interview 14 (M) mixed gender leadership; Interview 15 (F) mixed gender leadership; Interview 16 (F) mixed gender leadership	3 participants interviewed separately	1 hour each
9/07/15	Interview 17 (M) M	One participant	1 hour
12/ 07/15	Interview 18 (F) coaching / mindfulness/ residential	One participant	1 hour
15/07/15	Away Day (auto ethnography)	70 participants	1 day
23/ 07/15	Interview 19 (F) manager	One participant	1 hour
23/07/15:	Interview 20 (F) Interdepartmental residential	One participant	1 hour
23/07/15	Interview 21(M) Interdepartmental residential	One participant	1 hour
23/07/15	Interview 22 (F) Interdepartmental residential	One participant	1 hour
25/07/15	Interview 23 (M) Interdepartmental residential	One participant	1 hour
2/08/15	Interview 24 (F) facilitator	One participant	1 hour
10/10/15	Interview 25 (M) facilitator	One participant	1 hour