

# PROJECTME: A FILMED LIVE-STUDIO SELF-DEVELOPMENT LEARNING EVENT INFORMED BY EMPIRICAL RESEARCH INTO HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTITIONERS' LEARNING-FOR- TRANSFORMATION NEEDS

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## **Abstract**

*It is important that the investment managers make into the self-development of their employees identifies and targets the actual needs, and that real learning occurs that is observable in positively changed behaviours. This research identifies the self-development priorities of Human Resource (HR) managers and presents the findings from an innovative learning event called ProjectMe; a filmed innovative learning experience that involved project teams, an expert panel, presenters, live audience participants and live-streamed on-line participants in real-time. This involved using a recent organisational issue which was presented to two project teams to solve, presenting their recommendations 'live'. Over-laying the organisational issue was a self-development issue, in this instance, "The right amount of ego", which aimed to highlight the role of ego in individuals and teams, and challenge everyone to evaluate how that impacted on self. The multiple perspectives represented by the different learners provided excellent refractions of understanding, because so many perspective-giving vantage points offered learning opportunities for using reflective feedback which raised accountability, thereby taking people to the last step of transformation: action. As part of ascertaining what self-development HR practitioners needed, the results of a survey that asked them what it was they wanted to develop in themselves towards achieving their personal and/or professional goals are presented. The survey was sent via the Human Resource Institute of New Zealand (HRINZ) website to 790 practitioners, with 90 responses. Additionally, so as to make a methods contribution via this study, an expert panel of six was engaged in a role-play and statistical simulation (adapting Q methodology for a mock training needs analysis).*

**Key words:** learning, Q methodology, self-development, transformation.

## **Introduction**

The challenge that managers face today is ensuring that the investment they make in terms of training and development, is effective. All too often, employees undertake training that 'ticks the box', which may be acceptable when a technical skill is being taught, but much less satisfactory when the development is aimed at changing attitudes and behaviours, particularly when those behaviours are having a detrimental effect on the workplace. The challenge is assisting those with problematic behaviours to 'see' the negative impact of their behaviour in a way that maintains their dignity but brings about positive and enduring change.

Investigating and reflecting on *how* employees engage in effective self-development

resulted in the development and delivery of an innovative learning event called *ProjectMe*: a filmed learning experience that involved project teams, an expert panel, presenters, live audience participants and live-streamed on-line participants, all of which happened in real-time. A key success dynamic of *ProjectMe* was the combination of an organisational issue/problem overlaid with a self-development issue. The array of learning dimensions exemplified the authenticity and complexity that is needed to fully engage the mind and emotions in effective self-development. Perhaps the winning strategy was in the integration more than just that both were undertaken. For example, once the Project Teams had presented their recommendations, and the self-development issue was introduced, the project teams were then asked to reflect on and discuss how that self-development issue (ego, which is discussed later on) impacted within the groups, and indeed, the individual. Every learning event needs elements of the uncharted; that's what makes it exciting, engaging and fertile for individual transformation. All of the people present were 'learners'; even the experts. Underpinning the event was the conception that everyone contributes to the learning of others as well as themselves. The learning events also offered many touch-points for personal reflection in which to assimilate this learning. But it doesn't stop there; learning has to lead to action. That's what makes it transformational. It could be argued that transformation does not need to involve action, i.e. thinking differently about self in an ascendant direction is transformation. However, thinking upwardly differently about self will result in transformed behaviours. Transformation is defined here as the observable change resulting from confronting existing behaviours with intervention.

The *ProjectMe* concept, the organisational issue, and the self-development topic are discussed along with the theoretical justification that underpinned this project. Feedback from participants is presented which reveals the personal impact of the *ProjectMe* learning. This section is qualitatively rich and captures the true value of first-person voice and experience.

In conjunction with developing a transforming learning process, it was important to ensure that the topics for self-development were relevant and needed. A survey was sent via the Human Resource Institute of New Zealand (HRINZ) website to 790 practitioners, with 90 responses. Additionally, so as to make a methods contribution through this study, an expert panel of six was engaged in a role-play and statistical simulation (adapting Q methodology for a mock training needs analysis). The relevance of findings to social science is hopefully enhanced by the strongly qualitative and transparent nature of this paper.

### **Backdrop for the Research: Identifying the Professional-Development Milieu**

If there was ever a time for managers to invest in effective professional development, it's now. In the midst of economic, environmental and personal constraints, managers deal daily with all kinds of problems and stresses in the workplace. Staying on top of it all requires an increasing awareness and understanding of self, and how that self interacts with others in dealing effectively with the strategic and operational activities of the organisation. Straddling these problems are the increasingly complex dynamics of workplace relationships. If managers are defined by 'getting things done through people' (Gill & Pio, 2007) then it follows that relating to others is a major activity for managers. This is often overlooked in the course of 'getting things done' which competes for the manager's time and energy, and thus the effectiveness of 'through people' is compromised or left unattended. The point here is *people*. While managers generally ensure they have the most advanced equipment and technology, employee development is sometimes overlooked, or put in the too-hard, too expensive, too time-consuming, and even too touchy-feely basket. The challenge of finding innovative ways to assist managers to access affordable and effective professional development is, to an extent, resolved in the innovative transformative learning experience, *ProjectMe*.

After an in-depth search of the scientific information sources it was concluded that there

is no other research on the *ProjectMe* learning concept. The challenge and opportunity this created was that there was nothing to benchmark it by, yet also no cognitive or other constraints; thus “if we could dream it we could do it”. Although there were some fiscal restraints, the creativity within the team overcame most of those obstacles. Some desk research largely in the form of on-line searches from a marketing perspective, identified the following key points: increased company training budgets have occurred in response to a recognised skill shortage in many areas and a general increase of buy-in to the talent management concept; increased outsourcing of the training function in organisations facilitated by rapid growth of e-learning; and a major focus on leadership and management education as companies find themselves lean in middle management. There is a necessity to train staff from within the organisation, due to the lack of available personal/interpersonal skills at this level in the labour market; and the continued evolution of e-learning into a mainstream mode, enables staff to learn from a wide variety of sources and influencers. These trends are significant and were a driving force for the team of training developers pacing themselves at the forefront of innovation in modes of delivery and content.

Research into factors that make for effective professional development identified several key components. These were: increasing learning engagement and generational impact on learning, which informed the question, “How does a 21<sup>st</sup> manager and/or employee learn?” The ever-developing role of technology, transformation and change, and relevant teaching philosophies were also considered for best learning environments. As a result of the research the following practices in the studio learning event were adopted: problem solving in experiential learning situations, using mystery to increase learner engagement. Thus the inquisitiveness to know the unknown opens the learner up to new experiences, which creates rights-of-way for new knowledge acquisition towards transformation, reflective practice that uses learning as ‘mirrors’ (taking responsibility for self-perceptions and own behaviours), not ‘windows’ (seeing the problems associated with others, and not self), and learning media that stir all the senses.

So whilst there has already been progress in multi-media training techniques, the unique proposition for this self-development training concept was that it would simultaneously combine several media in the delivery as well as developing content that was uniquely relevant for business managers.

Through the secondary research it has become evident that there is a huge range of ‘off the shelf’ business and HR training programs. Many falls into the clichéd space of ‘new age self-development’ and many appear to be lacking practical business application. Further, many of the training products in the market appear to be inflexible and fixed in their content and delivery. This concept provided a multi-faceted learning platform for personal improvement with robust business application that was, most importantly, uniquely tailored around managers’ requirements, organisationally and developmentally.

#### *Research Focus*

The focus of the research was underpinned by the notions of learner engagement, learner accountability, the value of entertainment in learning, and the taxonomy of flexible learning which are discussed in turn.

#### *Learner Engagement*

Learner engagement refers to a psychological process that captures the “attention, interest, investment and effort [learners] expend in the work of learning” (Marks, 2000, p. 155). Engagement mandates the intellectual, affective and behavioural participation of the learner in the learning event.

Learner engagement occurs when “learners develop an interest in and form a bond with a topic that lasts beyond the short-term” (Schussler, 2009, p. 115). Cates and Bishop (2003) describe learner engagement in terms of being spontaneously absorbed and carried away in the task at hand. Learner engagement as a concept is based on the constructivist assumption that the level of participation of the learner influences the learning outcome (Coates, 2005). Dean, Christensen, Spector, Sioutine, and McCormack (2000) found that collaboration with other learners enhanced learner engagement. Haidet, O’Malley, and Richards (2002) undertook a study with teachers from Baylor College of Medicine in team exercise that required them to define, argue and defend the concepts to their peer teams, in contrast to a typical lecture-style learning scenario. In a post-survey, they were asked to rate their engagement. The results showed that their interest, engagement and staying on-task was very high ( $8.5 \pm 1.6$ ) which led the current researchers to conclude that team learning may be a powerful pedagogic tool to maintain learner engagement and engender a positive attitude to learning. The active engagement of the trainer is also identified as a key factor in learner engagement (Chen, Lattuca, & Hamilton, 2008).

#### *Focus on Learner Accountability*

This section highlights the relevance of terminology in reference to teaching vis-à-vis learning. The authors take a Strength-Based approach (Anderson, 2005; Blundo, 2001; Waterhouse & Virgona, 2008) which differentiates between ‘power over’ and ‘power with’. It changes the focus from teaching to learning and learner engagement, resulting in autonomy and personal responsibility for learning resting squarely on the learner (Chavez, 2007). Learning takes place through the active ‘ready and willing’ behaviour of the learner. It is what he or she does that is learnt, not what the trainer does (Biggs, 1999). This is exemplified in the aphorism that people can change only themselves. The epistemology of constructivism reinforces this assumption in that people take the building-blocks of experience and learning events to “build their own understanding and knowledge of the world” (Educational Broadcasting Corporation, 2004, p. 1). Learners construct their own paradigms of thinking and acting based on learning from their experience and reflection on that. These are catalysts for transformation, in a way that mere knowledge transmission cannot be. Thus learning becomes the focus, not teaching. In lifting the shroud of motive in self-development, the missing link for managers is the need to be directive in the focus of the learning. Thus the term focussed-constructivism is proposed because it acknowledges that no matter what self-development is determined and offered by management or some other authority or decision-maker (focus) learners still choose the learning they will take on board and use (construction) towards transformation. This does not take away from the focus of learning that managers put in place; rather it highlights that learning is assimilated subjectively, despite the focus.

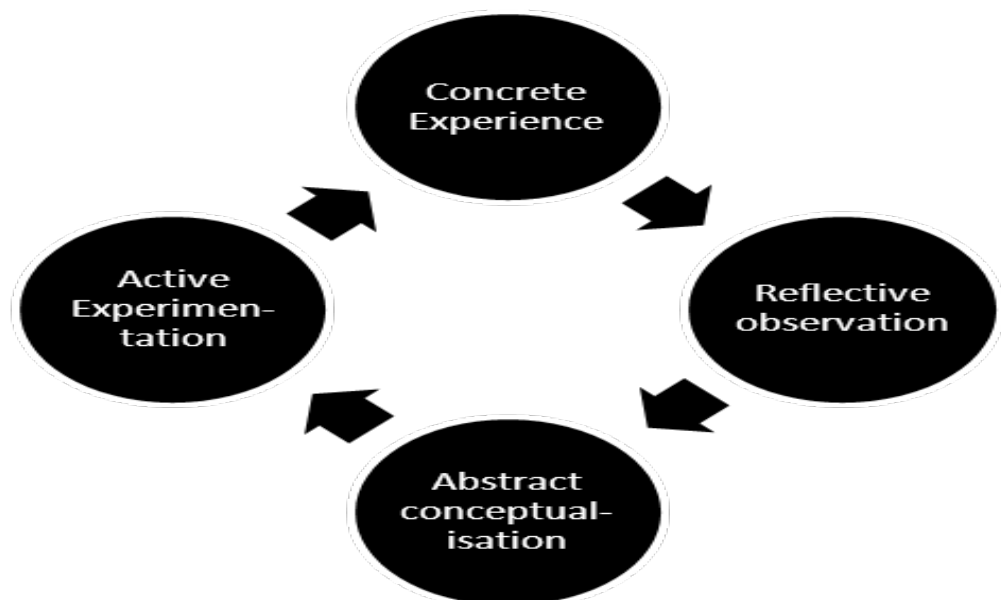
Kirk (2011) refers to this process of change or transformation in Chaos Theory which describes how inputs such as learning upset the status quo (or system) and are distilled through the previously constructed world of the learning which creates dis-order. Once this ‘perturbance’ reaches explosion point (referred to as the bifurcation point) that is a catalytic opportunity where one of two things occurs: the person either embraces the change which brings transformation, or refuses to change and thus returns to their previous state of stability, so no positive change takes place (Kirk, 2011). The point being made here is that managers need to strive to find new ways to enhance the process of learning so that learners choose transformation over stability. As an aside, in furthering Kirk’s contention (2011) it is highly likely that the former state of ‘stability’ actually declines, because the constant change process results in resistance, superiority and fear of future learning events.

The professional development market is very well contested, presented in traditional forms such as lectures, seminars and workshops, as well as a growing trend towards webinars which have proven to be popular and cost effective, both to run and to participate in. Webinars are indeed a new step in flexible learning but a limited one, in contrast to what the *ProjectMe* concept of learning offers, i.e. multiple perspectives on a topic presented, and rolled out to learners at multiple levels of engagement at the same time.

There is evidence that the latest generation of learners wants to be entertained, not just informed, so that learning engages all of their senses. “Sociologists refer to these as new generations of the human kind with high intellect, a multitasking nature and high awareness of their environments. At present, they are getting into the education stream with a high eagerness for creativity, flexibility and entertainment” (Perera, 2010, p. 72).

Recently, unprompted anecdotal evidence was gained when an Educational Textbook publisher stated that the focus on visual material such as DVD case studies to supplement textbooks has now switched insomuch that the textbook is becoming the supplement to learner engagement with visual technologies taking main stage. Entertainment as a tool for learning is difficult, if not impossible to replicate through traditional learning environments (Forney, 2004).

Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle (Boyatzis & Kolb, 1991) includes four stages of experience: the feeling dimension, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and experimentation (Kolb, 1984). The use of entertainment media for learning addresses all of these pedagogical considerations. Film now reaches beyond the educational offerings of the past in that it “is an integral part of our culture, a mirror in which we see ourselves” (Wedding & Boyd, 1999, as cited in Forney, 2004, p.5).



**Figure 1: Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984).**

*ProjectMe* provides a basis for personal and organisational reflection; and seeing oneself reflected on film provides objective data on which to evaluate performance and identify strengths (Hodges & Clifton, 2004; Schreiner & Anderson, 2005). “Making media use an active rather

than a passive experience for students is important” (Forney, 2004, p. 8). It assists learners to see what they don't see from looking from the inside-out, but offers another reflective vantage point: from the outside-in (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Dewey, 1933). In addition, another feature of learning through entertainment is the relaxation and fun element it brings thereby reducing stress that can inhibit learning (Tokcan, 2009).

“Technologies shape individuals and societies by framing what we see and how we see it. Fundamentally, media shape our patterns of perception” (McLuhan, 2003, p. 31). Thus media is a very compelling tool for learning.

### *Flexing the Taxonomy of Flexible Learning*

Although flexible learning is a term often understood to refer to on-line learning, this definition is too narrow in this instance because ‘flexibility’ is also a strategy that addresses situational complexities. Tuovinen (2000) agrees in that on-line learning may involve a time-disjunction between the trainer and the learner, the on-line material having been uploaded some time previously, and available at the discretion of the learner. There are other programmes such as Elluminate (Chasen, 2011) that engage learners more fully in the learning. While flexible learning frees learners from potential barriers to participation, it also offers learners the right to decide how, when, and where learning can occur and be accessed thereby providing adaptability to individual needs and circumstances (Bowles, 2004). The caution is that if on-line learning were the absolute domain of the use of ‘flexibility’, while it might be flexible for one trainee, it may prove inflexible for another (Willems, 2005). For example, whereas members of Generation Y are very tech-savvy, it can be a cause of fear and frustration for Baby Boomers. Multi-media designers for distance educators work to ensure that interaction involves eight levels of learner involvement:

1. Access which is passive; there is two-way control but not in real-time
2. The learner works through a hierarchy of choices predetermined by the trainer
3. The trainer can update information
4. The learner involvement – interactivity to achieve learning objectives
5. The learner participates in a simulated exercise
6. The learner navigates freely through hyperlinked information. This however still denotes trainer control (in setting up the precise hyperlinks)
7. The learners operate in a micro world of the actual environment
8. Learners are involved in designing multi-media (Chasen, 2011).

One of the downfalls in this taxonomy of multimedia interactions is that it requires a highly structured learning environment which, granted, reduces somewhat, but still remains regulated within the parameters of the on-line content (Tuovinen, 2000). The *ProjectMe* live learning event overcomes this malaise by encouraging the unpredictable contributions of participants, thus learning really is constructed in the ‘now’ even though content knowledge is pre-determined, learner responses, including the panel of experts is deliberately not pre-sought, for the explicit purpose of creating authenticity and concentrated engagement.

Generation X and Y learners are digitally advanced and learn best in a learning environment that presents learning in highly advanced technological approaches (Prensky, 2001, as cited in Gill & McConnell, 2010; Roehling, Vander Kooi, & Dykema, 2011). Dolezalek (2007) advises that development sessions should ensure that each generation has some of its learning preferences presented in the learning event.

*General Background of Research*

The first thing to establish for any research effort is the aim. The School of Applied Business, Otago Polytechnic continues to respond strategically to the needs of its stakeholders in aspiring to lead in business education and professional development. External forces such as those created by economic and political factors impact the School, resulting in the need to respond proactively by finding ways to embrace technological advances and create ease of access for professional development that is innovative, timely, relevant, and that adds value to the individual and their organisation by way of enduring positive self-development. The idea of running a multi-media *live* event, while not new in social science has an added edge: the cameras and the mix of experts, learners and media people created an vibrant environment and enough tension for change to occur in learners, and particularly in those who have historically relied on predicting the learning because they have been ‘trained’ before and may be resistant to it. The likelihood of an expressed Hawthorne Effect is acknowledged (Gill & Pio, 2007). However in response, learners who have taken express time out to participate in a learning event should be the focus. Awareness that the learning is being recorded as it happens may also create a behaviour-moderating effect, as learners are likely to want to be captured (archived) in their best light.

The *ProjectMe* idea encompasses the notions of experiential learning (Baker, Jensen, & Kolb, 2005; Hubbs & Brand, 2005; Kolb, 1984) and lifelong learning (Aspin & Chapman, 2000; Flemming & Panizzon, 2010; Kirkpatrick & Garrick, 2001; Merriam & Leahy, 2005; Staron, Jasinki, & Weatherley, 2006) at a conceptual and pragmatic level, while providing a vehicle for establishing a hub of personal and organisational professional-development within the School of Applied Business. The branding *ProjectMe* was the inventiveness of a third-year Otago Polytechnic Design student who undertook research on finding a name that represented the learning concept while simultaneously implicitly articulating something about what the learning was about, from the name. He came up with *ProjectMe* which encompasses the ‘me’ paradigm, that there is something to work on in self. But also *ProjectMe* benefits from the use of the verb form, to project, with an easily recognised connection to moving forward, transitioning from a present state to a different, preferably better one. *ProjectMe* comes with a sense of ‘putting oneself out there’. It suggests a tacit meaning of enduring transformation as well, i.e. once ‘projected’, there’s no ‘going back’, as development implies forward momentum.

*Sample of Research*

The research sample was made up of two groups of participants. Firstly, access to the Human Resource Institute of New Zealand (HRINZ) provided the researchers with an ideal pool of people whose intentional focus is professional development, and who work on behalf of managers to address the problems that occur in and between people in an organisation. A survey was sent via the HRINZ website to 790 practitioners, with 90 responses. Superficially, this amounts to a technical response rate of only 11.4 per cent (see footnote<sup>1</sup>).

1 It would appear that the response rate here was only a slight improvement over what HRINZ reports being typical for their own online surveys. However, in reality, the response rate may very well be upwards of 100 percent. This is because most HRINZ members would not be expected to respond to a single question like this, unless four conditions are all simultaneously satisfied: 1) They have to notice the query. 2) They have to be conscious of having articulated, in their own thoughts, a primary or dominant personal development goal, such that this particular sort of HRINZ query would be sufficiently relevant to them to prompt a response. 3) They have to be willing to reveal this personal desire (or more typically a personal inadequacy to overcome) to researchers that are very likely strangers at some distance. 4) They have to choose to make space in their

HRINZ personnel advised that the typical response to on-line surveys through the HRINZ website rate is 10%. Secondly, the people who participated in the 2-hour *ProjectMe* event in June 2011 were invited to participate in an on-line Feedback Questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent to 35 participants with 15 responses, a response rate of almost 43%. Although it was a small survey, it was sent to 100% of the participants. Apart from the first question, the questionnaire collected authentic descriptive data and is presented verbatim. The validity of these results is upheld because all of the responses are by people who actually participated, i.e., none were observers only, so each descriptive comment is taken from their direct personal experience, and the setting was the actual setting for the event, and not (say) a laboratory setting, and is therefore “accurately representing what is happening in the situation” (Hussey & Hussey, 1997, p. 173).

### *Instruments and Procedures*

#### *Human Resource Practitioners On-line Survey*

The survey used a simple progressive on-line process, where participants answered one question and then progressed to the next screen by pressing ‘next’ on the screen. There were three demographic questions (two forced answers) and one descriptive question. Awareness of the discipline provided insight into the design which was to get to the point as quickly as possible. The forced demographic questions related to gender and age-group, and the free-choice demographic question asked for information about current position, role and organisation. The forced descriptive question asked, “What is the one thing in yourself that you want to overcome to achieve your personal/professional goals?” The purposeful use of ‘in yourself’ aimed to personalize the question while removing the likelihood of answers such as “more money” or “more time”. The survey was open for four weeks with a reminder email sent one week prior to close-off.

One premise here was that HR managers, in industry, would see value in trying to address their own goals for personal development. As business schools are increasingly competing in the HR consultancy sector, an unfolding premise was that an HR manager’s priorities for goals to target, would likely differ from the priorities of business academics. This led to the utilization of Q Sorts methodology to identify likely priorities in the HR practitioner community and how those may be distinct from the priorities that business academics might assume. In deciding which goals to target, arguably, both perspectives are worthy of strategic consideration, but should not just be arbitrarily summed. Hence, the attempt here was to make a methods contribution.

Q methodology, in its simplest sense, applies the logic of dimension reduction to the clustering and comparative analysis of sample subsets (sub-samples), these typically being subsets of human raters with, presumably, differing perspectives. Like its data-analytical cousin, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), Q methodology has become much easier to accomplish as high-capacity computing power has become more affordable. While EFA is most typically used to “factor” components or clusters of items on a sociological, political, or psychological questionnaire, Q methodology instead “factors” or sorts clusters of humans, typically, based on these human clusters’ competing perspectives, attitudes, or viewpoints. Thus, while EFA treats

busy electronic lives to respond to the query. The technical calculation of response rate would more likely be the proportion of the total noticing the query (point 1) and choosing to make time for it (point 4). If points 2) and 3) were of no consequence, then this response rate of 11.4 percent, would, indeed be far too low. In other words, it would suggest that the responders were peculiar, and possibly of very limited interest. But, in fact, this study presumes that these responders are distinct; specifically, they are the respondents of interest, because they have articulated a primary or dominant personal development goal, and in responding, show that they are capable of making the first steps towards achieving it.



humans as cases, each typically responding with varying degrees of affinity or agreement with each survey item, Q methodology turns this on its ear, treating humans as EFA treats items, and treating items (or goal statements in the present study) as cases.

While one might attempt an EFA in anticipation of two or three factors, and employing a six-item survey, with as few as ninety human participants (i.e., fifteen or more participants per item, thirty or more participants per factor), a Q sort can produce a raw data matrix of the same size (six by ninety cells) with the inverse rules-of-thumb (e.g., six raters prioritizing ninety goal statements). This was exactly the analytical scenario engaged in this role-play simulation.

### *Expert Panel Analyses*

#### *Phase One: Dimension reduction via expert panel qualitative review*

The cleaned data were sent to an expert panel of six people made up of five females and one male who were identified as having HR management experience and/or educational teaching/learning experience. The panel was asked to identify what they considered were the top six self-development themes. They were told they didn't have to use specific words from the survey (although they could), i.e. they could use a theme that incorporated what it was they interpreted from what participants had said. A non-related example, so as not to be considered leading, was included to clarify the instruction. Secondly, the panel were asked to rank their six themes based on what they considered the data indicated occurred most frequently with 1 meaning most important to 6 meaning least important.

The qualitative dimension reductions (or theme identifications) from this first expert panel were then iteratively summarized by two of this article's authors. After four electronically-communicated iterations, complete consensus was reached on the six fundamental themes (see Table 1) conveyed in the 90 responses from the sample.

**Table 1. Main recurring themes in original data set.**

Main recurring themes in original data set	
1.	Confidence /courage
2.	Self-management/accountability
3.	Influence/persuasiveness
4.	Conflict management/conflict resilience
5.	Insight-fuelled strategic leadership
6.	Front-stage communication capability

#### *Phase Two: Dimension reduction applied to role-play simulation*

The above data-set presented an opportunity to make a methods contribution to this arena. In tight financial times, business schools are increasingly under-pressure to augment their normal revenue streams with consultancy revenues derived from serving industry clients. The original data set potentially supports the analysis of two competing perspectives on prioritizing training topics likely to succeed in attracting new training contracts with industry clients.

Logically, the two competing perspectives relevant here are the "anticipated view of an HR manager" versus the "anticipated view of a business school lecturer" (presuming both would be reasonably aware of what the business school in question could deliver in a training/learning intervention in this arena). Success in getting this role-play simulation to "play out" this way was achieved by an adaptation of Q methodology (McKeown, 1988).

*Participants:* Six business school lecturers, three of whom were HR specialists in the New Zealand polytechnic sector (all six were females between the ages of 30 and 60 holding postgraduate qualifications, and each having over a decade of degree-level teaching experience).

*Instrumentation:* The ninety items in the original data set presented in an Excel worksheet, with a column added for the six participants to enter a prioritization score (0 = lowest or nil priority; 10 = highest possible priority).

*Procedure:* These six participants were assigned to one of two sub-panels of three lecturers each. The HR lecturers were asked to assign priority scores (between 0 and 10) to each of the ninety goal statements, silently role-playing as if they were, actual HR managers in industry (but with “insider” insights into training-delivery competencies of the business school). The three non-HR lecturers made up the sub-panel, and they were asked to assign priority scores (between 0 and 10) based, on purely pedagogical grounds (i.e., each goal statement’s suitability for being addressed by a short-course intervention).

#### *ProjectMe Participants On-line Feedback Survey*

The first section of the survey was initiated with a question that asked participants to rate the effectiveness of the learning event using a 6-point Likert Scale, and the next eight questions invited a descriptive response to delve into the rating participants had given to the previous question. The next section asked participants to comment on the different participant groups, including which group they belonged to. Participants were then asked to comment on and identify which environment they were in: physical or on-line. The next question reported on focused on ascertaining participants’ views on the self-development issue, ‘the right amount of ego’. Finally participants were asked if there was anything else they wished to add. For each descriptive question several qualitative descriptions have been selected and presented verbatim in the data analysis section. Questions progressively became more personal in an effort to ascertain the deeper and affective responses of participants.

## **Results of Research**

As mentioned above, this second phase of this study adapted Q methodology (McKeown, 1988) to the mission of assessing competing perspectives in prioritizing targets for a training intervention. The modern computer-based technologies employed today in Q methodologies present the analyst with choices, sometimes daunting. As with Pedhazur and Schmelkin (1991), where one is dealing with latent concepts (like a rater’s priorities) and where competing factors are likely to have overlapping components (i.e., non-orthogonal dimensions or correlated factors), then the dimension extraction method of choice is principal axis factoring allowing oblique rotations (e.g., PAF/direct oblimin in SPSS). In the current study, some overlap in the sub-panels’ perspectives, was likely given the panelists’ shared knowledge of the school’s training-delivery competencies.

The freeing-up of rotations in PAF/direct oblimin typically gives the SPSS algorithm the greatest flexibility in successfully “spearing” a component or cluster of items with its presumed factor axes. (See the two axes successfully “spearing” the two subsets of raters in Figure 2). Here, of course, we again note that EFA is typically focused on grouping subsets of items, not subsets of raters or panel members as we have just done in this adaptive Q sorting.

Initial (i.e., raw) expert sub-panel ratings predictably presented with substantial noise, or

“likely outlier” ratings. This is especially so, given this was a simulation (via silent “role-play”) where the HR lecturers were assuming HR practitioner-managers roles (i.e., not academic role), and where the non-HR lecturers were more reasonably acting as business pedagogy experts. Both of these small sub-panels were acting as if reasonably knowledgeable about the training and industry-consulting capacities of the small business school.

Given that each panel’s rating set typically presented a “majority view” it was straightforward to identify the “wild” rating occurring within this, so long as the majority was reasonably congruent (and where this congruency allowed the researchers to see how the two sub-panels’ competing perspectives could be forced to evince in such a simulation). Fortunately, in the present instance, it was uncommon for a reasonable congruence (between at least two members of a sub-panel) to not clearly manifest. But it must be emphasized that the data set should not be viewed as empirical evidence standing-alone; given outlier ratings were liberally replaced with each sub-panel’s average for that statement (i.e., using “mean” replacement on roughly one-fourth of the simulated ratings in a way that amplified what could otherwise have been subtle distinctions). This is consistent with the goal of making a methods contribution whereby Q methodology is adapted to multiple paradigm (or “competing perspective”) panel ratings of nearly a hundred qualitative responses to a single item.

An actual empirical view of these competing perspectives would likely require panels of at least twice this size, such that outliers generally would have little distorting impact. In that improved situation, extreme outliers, should they evince, could be discarded by conventional data-cleansing methods, as opposed to the convenient one we have applied to this role-play simulation. Furthermore, a valid empirical panel study would not only engage a pair of much larger sub-panels, but the “HR manager” panel would ideally be made up of practitioners from industry, not HR lecturers. So, this methodological advice, and the attempted methods contribution, would need to be adjusted somewhat for other applications.

In accordance with the “simulations-convenient” data cleansing protocol, i.e., replacing each peculiar or outlier expert rating with the average of its panel ratings (e.g., 2, 1, 6, becoming 2, 1, 1.5, etc.), the competing perspectives of an HR manager versus a business school lecturer can become salient via a Q-sort procedure engaging even the smallest panels. Predictably, given such a liberal data-cleaning, the Q-sort produces a logical and salient set of factor loads (see Table 2 and Figure 2), and very respectable Bartlett’s (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991) and KMO omnibus results (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001) (See Table 3).

**Table 2. Pattern Matrix<sup>a</sup>.**

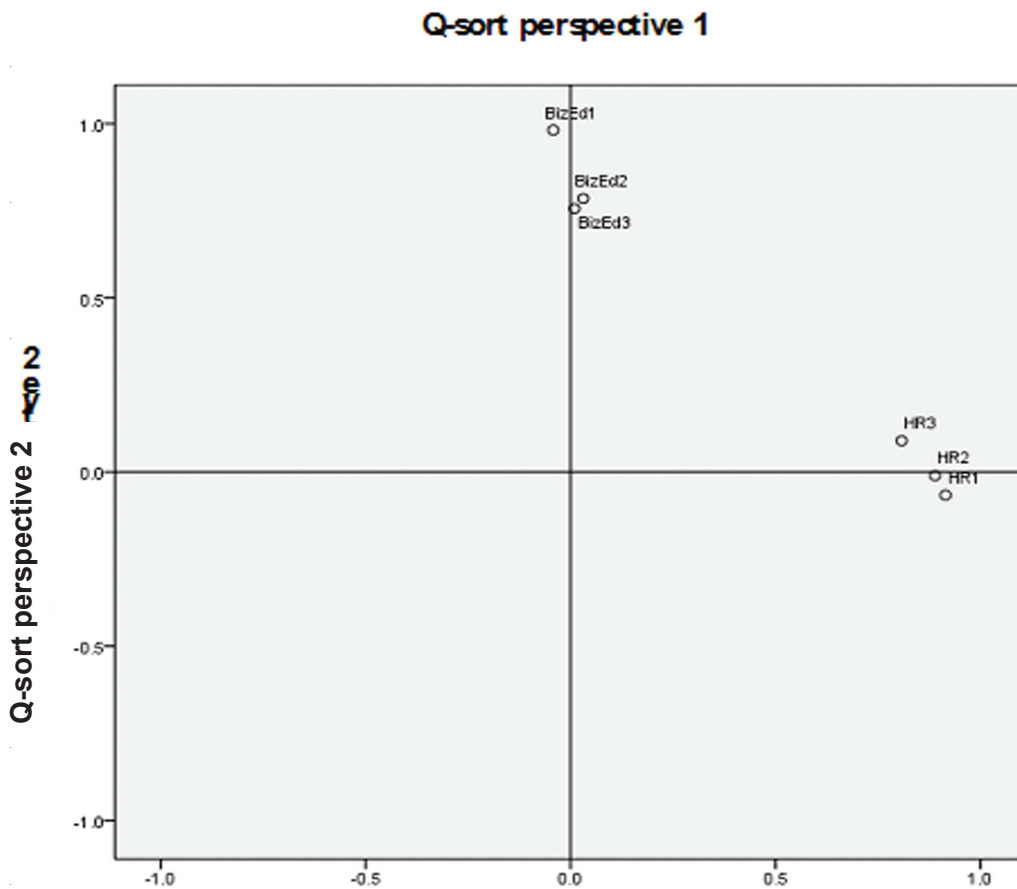
Pattern Matrix <sup>a</sup>	Q sort perspectives	
	1	2
HR1	0.915	
HR2	0.889	
HR3	0.808	
BS1		0.981
BS2		0.785
BS3		0.756

Key: HR1, 2 & 3 = HR manager perspective, BS1, 2 & 3 = Business School lecturer perspective

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring

Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalizations

a. Rotation converged with 5 iterations



**Figure 2: Q Sort Perspective Plot in Rotated Factor Space.**

Both sub-panel perspectives are strong, and similarly so. However, Q-sort perspective 1 (the apparent perspective of HR managers - - measured and conveyed horizontally left-to-right in Figure 2) seems to be slightly more uniform or consistent in this strength, i.e., with less variance in its three Q-sort loadings.

**Table 3. KMO and Bartlett's Test.**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.739
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	323.381
	df	15
	Sig.	0.000

So, as would be reasonably expected in this simulation, the competing perspectives of business school academics, versus HR managers manifest with cleanly discernable perspectives on how best to respond to HR staff's personal goals (noting that in Table 2, printer suppression has been applied to factor loads smaller than 0.3). The liberal data-cleansing efforts (i.e., having each "outlier rating replaced by optimal rater averages" ensured that the simulation would yield stable structure in a Q methodology), thus collectively producing the clean clustering of "like-minded" experts seen in Figure 2. In other words, in the psychological or mental space

conveyed in this figure, each rater is seen to be high on only one “perspective-conveying” factor, and very low on the other. However, as anticipated when choosing to allow oblique rotations (via PAF/direct oblimin), these two competing perspectives are somewhat correlated ( $r = .28$ ) (see Table 4), possibly reflecting that both sub-panels had roughly equal knowledge of the training-delivery capabilities.

**Table 4. Q Sort Perspective Correlation Matrix.**

Q Sort	1	2
1	1.000	0.284
2	0.284	1.000

*ProjectMe Participants On-line Feedback Survey Analysis*

The survey consisted of 20 questions and was sent to all of the 35 participants via email (See Table 5).

**Table 5. Analysis of Participant Responses to Feedback Questionnaire.**

Analysis of Participant Responses to Feedback Questionnaire			
	TP	TR	%
MC and Webmaster	3		
<i>ProjectMe</i> team members	8	5	33.3
Expert team	3	1	6.7
Audience participants	7	3	20
CEO of focus organisation	1		
On-line participants	6	2	13.3
<i>ProjectMe</i> team	5		
Media personnel	2		
Presenters	3		
Skipped question		4	26.7
<b>Total = 38.5% RR</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>

Key: TP = Total Participants; TR = Total Responses.

An analysis of *ProjectMe* participants’ responses follows, beginning with their rating of the effectiveness of the learning (See Table 6).

**Table 6. Effectiveness was the learning experience.**

How effective was the learning experience?	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)
Very effective	1	8
Effective	5	42
Somewhat effective	5	42
Somewhat ineffective	0	0
Ineffective	0	0
Very ineffective	1	8
Skipped question	3	

Six of the twelve responses stated they found *ProjectMe* was effective with one stating 'very effective'. One participant stated it was very ineffective. This comment came from an on-line participant. It is acknowledged that there were teething problems with the technology which on-line participants found understandably frustrating. Interestingly, only eight people received access to the URL, but there were 39 reported users. It is uncertain whether these were the six people who participated logging on or off, or if the interest in the event resulted in the original people giving the URL to others. (For future events we will include user passwords, and make all questions forced.) Not everyone commented on everything and not every comment is presented here for sake of expediency and avoiding repetition. Comments are recorded verbatim, although spelling and grammar have been corrected.

After rating the effectiveness of *ProjectMe*, participants were asked "What made it effective?"

- *It was not a static presentation of ideas from one source, but the combination of the two project teams, the reflection from the panel and the audience participation*
- *Real examples of practice and the participants knowledge*
- *Diverse group, interesting and intelligent conversations, problem solving*
- *Varied programme. I usually find it difficult to hold attention for over an hour but the audience experience was varied enough. Good number of different people to watch and listen to and well hosted. Links between segments were effective. I felt it was directed well*
- *Listening to a number of different perspectives from a theoretical and practical focus. Observing others dealing with an issue and the way/s in which they reached an outcome and reflecting on that during the session*
- *The novelty of the setting was certainly useful and the calibre of the panel / project teams helped make it real learning*
- *The pressured environment of the live session actually allows a more authentic result to occur*

Next they were asked, "What made it less effective?"

- *There was a major technical glitch with bandwidth that severely impacted the online experience. I suspect that this was an internal network problem. [which we fixed during the event, but had start-up problems]*
- *Case study was not deep enough. In depth prior knowledge of the organisations was required by the teams all commented that 18 minutes was not enough time to analyse what was the problem and how and what change was necessary*
- *More audience activities would be good. Not being very knowledgeable of the case study subject myself, I think that some audience members including me struggled to understand what the project groups were working on*
- *Some of the panel members' observations, comments, and responses to questions drifted off the issue. Whereas I would have liked to hear the views of some of the project team participants*

- *Nothing*
- *The technology was poor at first and I had no idea what I was supposed to be doing - I felt ignored, as if I was standing on the pavement looking in the window at a party in a restaurant...everyone looked like they were having fun but I was excluded*

Participants were then asked, "How could it be more effective?"

- *It might be possible to trim the time off the length of the session? Or break it into two sessions? There was discussion at the DVD presentation of the two project teams having tight deadlines to work in, and whether an offline pre-recorded session would have allowed more thorough work*
- *The interactions and the result between the team members will be more honest (a la the sorts of questions where you say the first response to verbal prompts etc. (Sorry, I lack the knowledge/concepts for a more succinct answer!) I feel a more considered answer could feel more scripted. OR a pre-recorded session could be countered with "live" response from the teams*
- *I would also agree that maybe the compere could have announced the structure/format of the session. I admit to taking 10 minutes or so to catch on initially!*
- *I think that there could have been more participation from the audience groups throughout the entire session, rather than the couple of discrete Q & A moments*
- *Ensure that the studio audience can hear the project teams when they are working on the issue*

Participants were then asked to comment on the most enjoyable experience of *ProjectMe*:

- *I enjoyed the whole shebang! But the final hour summary and discussion was very interesting - in fact I was quite surprised at how interested I was, and have to admit that my preconceptions of this maybe being a slightly waffly topic were pleasantly dashed! :-)*
- *Enjoyed the opportunity of being involved*
- *Watching how the production all came together*
- *Meeting others of similar minds*
- *The whole lot. It was a really great experience and good to be part of it*
- *Being part of the project, meeting new and interesting people*
- *Listening to what the expert panel had to say. They shared a lot of insight*
- *Talking to the other people online*
- *Being part of a new way of learning, listening to peoples viewpoints on egos and managing them. The variety of mediums used in the learning experience*

- *I enjoyed the whole thing*

They were then asked what was the least enjoyable experience to which they commented:

- *Probably the only real criticism of the content that I have is lack of an outline at the start. But I have no major reservations about the way that ProjectMe was done. In fact I think that places like [another department] could learn a lot from how this was done!*
- *Not being sure of what the process was*
- *Not knowing exactly what my role was*
- *Nothing*
- *As a studio audience member, hoping not to be asked for a question when I didn't have one*
- *Enjoyed it all but a lot of time given to panel members and some of their input not as useful or as valuable as I had hoped.*
- *Being on camera without having a proper briefing of what was expected of us was very disconcerting*

The following question was, "What was the most significant thing (learning or moment) you took away?"

- *The analysis of ego and what that really means to me and how it affects what I do and react*
- *The sincere reflection around the 'concept of self-image' that people have and how it manifests itself in the world of business was very interesting. I could watch that part of the DVD [filmed version of live event] again. Problem solving on the spot with little background information or detail*
- *Insights into other people's views*
- *Some good stuff on EGO*
- *I was part of a panel. The exercise was very good and valuable to the organisation in question*
- *How important [panel member] regards listening in his leadership and management skills*
- *Describing egos!*

Delving yet further, we asked, "What are you committed to change as a result of the learning?"

- *Taking a step backward before moving forward so I can clearly see what is happening*



- *Hmm. I'm certainly more mindful of the role of ego at the moment*
- *Use my EGO to perform better*
- *Keeping ego in check!!!*
- *Greater self-belief and I will ask people more questions to hear what **they** have to say*
- *Nothing*
- *Reflecting on my own ego and how to manage it*

Participants were then asked to comment on the topic, 'the right amount of ego':

- *Obviously this was aimed at people in a management role (I guess!?) however it had broader ideas that anyone could identify with and use to reflect on. For instance the topic of humility was mentioned, and again, I was struck by the group's "popular" conception of what that meant. But if you look deeper, then you see that humility is quite a different beast. (I.e. being humble or having humility is not concordant with a lack of conviction, or poor self-image, being retiring, etc.).*
- *Good lord I could almost want to do a management paper at SAB! [School of Applied Business]*
- *Good topic*
- *Could have had some strong take-away points for the watchers at the end.*
- *Very valuable.*
- *Particularly relevant. Many perspectives alerted the participants to diverse views*
- *Very good topic and very relevant in my work as an HR Advisor*

Finally, participants were asked if there was anything else they wanted to add:

- *I thoroughly enjoyed participating in the pilot for ProjectMe. I think that it's the blend of the 'live' format with the audience participation that makes this format work effectively. I do not think this would have been as effective if this had just been a "clip-show" of pre-recorded segments with a panel of talking heads.*
- *In my mind this perfectly encapsulates a solution to the problem with the bulk of online blended training. Most of that is just stuff dumped online with the expectation that people can trawl through it and "learn". This is the equivalent of simply uploading a textbook, yet somehow it's thought to be more effective. The bulk of proponents for this have forgotten that there is a dynamic, human dimension to learning that is as important to students success as having well-made books and resources. I think [name given] and her team have grasped that perfectly and they deserve to be fully commended for their hard work and success.*

- *This is definitely an idea worth pursuing and with fine tuning I can imagine this being used to present training to staff as well as students*
- *I feel compelled to make the observation that I have never seen anything as effective as this*
- *The ProjectMe session was a great thing to be part of. I would relish the chance to be a participant in the future*
- *Thanks for inviting me to take part, [Name given-this was an anonymous survey]*
- *Appreciated the opportunity to be part of the workshop. I think there is a lot of value in this learning and whilst there are considerable resources involved I think that with some tuning, the right mix of people and subject matter there is a lot of untapped value learning in this way.*
- *Good pilot and well done – some things to improve but well worth the session*

## Discussion

Key insights from the *ProjectMe* participants suggest that the sophisticated use of technology, live filming of the learning event, live-stream on-line participation, pre-filmed one-week-old organisational case study, supporting DVD clips, and power points, integrated with a diversity of participants and participant roles, was an effective way of learning, and that real learning took place. Participants appreciated that theory was backed up by real examples of practice from people who were 'doing it', which reinforced the learning.

The multiple participant groups brought different perspectives which were used to judge and moderate personally-held perspectives/values/beliefs that resulted in participants challenging their own paradigms. The learner-centric environment gave all participants (including the experts) the opportunity to challenge long-standing paradigms about the self-development issue, and adjust that thinking in a non-judgemental way. Having multiple perspectives of thinking around a managerial problem, together with the self-development issue, allowed participants the freedom to explore the deep-level beliefs and values that inform their thinking, thereby providing excellent refractions of understanding. This in turn gave opportunities for individuals to construct new learning. The multiple perspectives of thinking within the different groups and across the groups was observable. Furthermore, there was visual information available 'in the now', that gave rise to other discernible factors such as attitudes, aggressiveness, compliance, depth of belief, confidence, and personality. Not only did participants have information, they also had behavioural cues to use in processing the incoming information.

The comments from the participants also reinforced the literature in that engaged learners are fully involved, attentive and absorbed in that learning. *ProjectMe* appears to have achieved that, as evidenced in the participants' words: "attention-holding", "varied", "novel", "new way", "never seen anything so effective as this", "relish the chance to be involved again", "enjoyed participating", and "a lot of untapped value".

The decision to focus on *The right amount of ego* was appropriate given the results of the HR practitioner questionnaire with confidence/courage rated the highest self-development need. The organisational issue offered complexity for learning and opportunity to observe ego in action. After the presenters had completed relating how ego is observable, project teams were asked to discuss and share what role ego had played in their project work in addressing the organisational issue. The audience participants were also asked to discuss what they had observed.

## Conclusions

The value of this research is three-fold. Firstly, it describes an authentic way of self-discovery, which not only benefits the learner, but also provides rich information that assists others' learning in a vibrant, authentic environment. For example, not only did participants hear what the expert panel had to say, they were also privy to the panellists' behaviour and attitudes which either reinforced what they were saying, or refuted it. In so doing, it challenged learners to make changes that led to transformative action. The multiple learning opportunities of the *ProjectMe* event seem to have encouraged that desired change. The *ProjectMe* event offered not only an alternative to traditional learning processes, but also participation in integrated content (organisational and self-developmental) in a live situation. Thus, opportunity to challenge attitudes and/or behaviour was brought about through explicit reflective practice and feedback from others and in turn offered ways to address self-development training issues facing 21<sup>st</sup> century managers. The mode of filming the event caught people being themselves (mostly) and also provided an archive with which to reflect on their actions after the event, and indeed provided managers with evidence of the learning of their employees.

This then raises the issue of ethics. We obtained ethics approval from the Otago Polytechnic Research Ethics Committee. Furthermore each person including the film crew was given an Information Sheet, and if in agreement, signed the Media Release form. Only one person chose to participate but did not sign the form (although this person did give written permission for their contribution to be used for student learning). Upon reflection, persons who do not sign will not be able to participate in future iterations.

Secondly, six topics were identified by HR practitioners as the most significantly needed areas of self-development. These topics not only inform Consultants and Trainers as to where the need for training lies, but also identify where organisations could target future self-development. Future research could focus on each of these topics in other experiential studies.

Finally, the attempted research methods contribution facilitates other interested organisations who wish to identify appropriate targets for training interventions or consultancy. The qualitative findings reinforce the value of learning that influences cognitive and affective dynamics towards achieving real and deliberate learning leading to transformation. As mentioned above, the quantitative analysis is preliminary using a role-play simulation. Further research could focus on investing in resourcing a larger panel of practitioners. This study also suggests the utility of a single-question descriptive questionnaire (plus demographic information), in that targeted sample may be more likely to participate; it confirms the self-development focus of *ProjectMe*, and has also demonstrated through adapted Q methodology, that a single-question data-set is worthy of quantitative analysis.

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