**Reflections on a Leadership Development Evaluation Collaboratory (LDEC)**

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**Introduction**

In this paper we draw on work already being carried out linking ideas of collaboratory (Muff, 2014; Wulf, 1993) and leadership development (see Kempster and colleagues, forthcoming). Kempster and colleagues describe a collaboratory as a workshop to share insights, results and progress. They draw on the definition of a collaboratory from Wulf (1993: 19), which suggests that it is a:

*‘… center without walls, in which a nation’s researchers can perform their research without regard to physical location, interacting with colleagues, accessing instrumentation, sharing data and computational resources… accessing information from digital libraries.’*

From Wulf’s work Kempster and colleagues emphasise that a collaboratory should not be a one-off workshop but a process and should be interdisciplinary in nature; a collective action research project. We therefore investigate some of these issues in a collaboratory set up to consider different approaches to evaluating leadership development.

*Background to the Leadership Development Evaluation Collboratory (LDEC)*

The LDEC was developed by the *University of the West of England* (UWE) and the *University of Winchester* (UoW), with funding from the *South West NHS Leadership Academy*. The meetings take place once a quarter either at UoW or UWE and have between 20 and 30 attendees at each event from mainly a public sector background but also some involved from the private and third sectors.

Generally each collaboratory has taken the form of:

* plenary speakers on theoretical and research considerations linked to leadership development evaluation and issues of evaluation more broadly
* the presentation of case studies on leadership development (largely from the NHS, but some insights from other public sector initiatives)
* small group (between 8 and 10 members) discussion sharing learning from these presentations that may develop practice in leadership evaluation.

**Research Design**

Our approach to the research was based on gaining a deep and wide interpretation for the impact and effects of the collaboratory in both an evaluative sense and to also look for further academic research avenues. We therefore looked for as many data collection techniques as possible (as recommended by Edwards and Turnbull, 2013) and hence the research methodology was ethnographic in nature. The following processes for gathering data were therefore employed:

*Observation –* At each event observations were undertaken by two of the three lead researchers and notes were taken. More general notes were also taken by a research assistant.

*Postcards –* At the end of each meeting participants were asked to write thoughts, suggestions and/or recommendations on postcards, which were then collected by organisers and collated by the research team.

*Letter Writing –* The research team took part in an innovative process of letter writing. This process consisted of one researcher writing a letter to the other two researchers with a pre-arranged order for the next two researchers to respond with letters in return.

*Interviews (to be conducted June/July 2017) -* 20 interviews with key stakeholders either face-to-face or via skype or telephone will be conducted as part of further data gathering for the research project.

**Initial Findings**

Specific themed issues that have come out of the data so far are:

*Hosting and Facilitating –* The evidence would suggest that whilst the hosting and facilitation has been of a high standard there are one or two developments we can make to how the days are run.

*Mix of Participants –* We would also like to have the opportunity to widen the mix of participants with engagement from more private and charitable sector organisations engaged in the collaboratatories.

*Continuous Dynamic Feedback –* A further development of the collaboratory would be to re-engage with case studies continuously and gain further feedback on how various projects are progressing and how the collaboratory process has helped.

*Tensions and Politics in LDE –* One of the issues that the data seems to make apparent is the ongoing discussion around the various intended and unintended outcomes of leadership development and how there are tensions across differing stakeholders

*The Role of Language in LDE –* There seems to be evidence of people using metaphors as a basis for understanding outcomes of leadership development.

*Space and Place–* The evidence so far would suggest that there is the need for further research around how experiences of space and place impact on LDE.

*Context and Creativity –* Following on from the theme above, we also believe there are important areas of research around context and aesthetics and how these inform how a collaboratory works and what ideas and projects are discussed.

We hope to further explore these findings within the conference presentation and as part of developing a full paper.

**References**

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