

-  What is *situated-learning* and why does it lead to high performance?
-  Why is a *whole organisational approach* so critical to success?
-  How does situated-learning contribute to:
  -  quality improvement/assurance?
  -  incremental (positive) change?
  -  professional development?
-  How can we overcome the barriers to high performance?
-  Why does HR have such a key role to play?
-  What can we do, and who can help, to achieve the rapid achievement of high performance?

## **A discussion paper for FE Principals and their senior management teams.**

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## What's the secret?

There is an unequivocal link between continuing professional development (CPD) and whole college performance, but only when it is done right ..... and much is not!

Collaborative learning driven by current professional practice (Situated-Learning) is a major driver of quality improvement and positive, incremental change. When situated learning is a firm expectation across the whole organisation - *hearts and minds* – it is the 'magic dust' necessary to create sustainable high performance.

Do you know whether your institution is

already doing this fully, because it simply will not work if the approach is fragmentary or anything less than a whole organisational approach?

### Recipe for High Performance

1. Take a good bunch of professionals, making sure that all the essential ingredients are included and mix well.
2. Toss in a handful of 'real issues' (seasonal, wherever possible).
3. Season well with hearts and minds and allow the mixture to stand until a firm crust of magic dust starts to form.
4. Use as a self-raising agent in all future recipes.

## What is Situated-Learning?

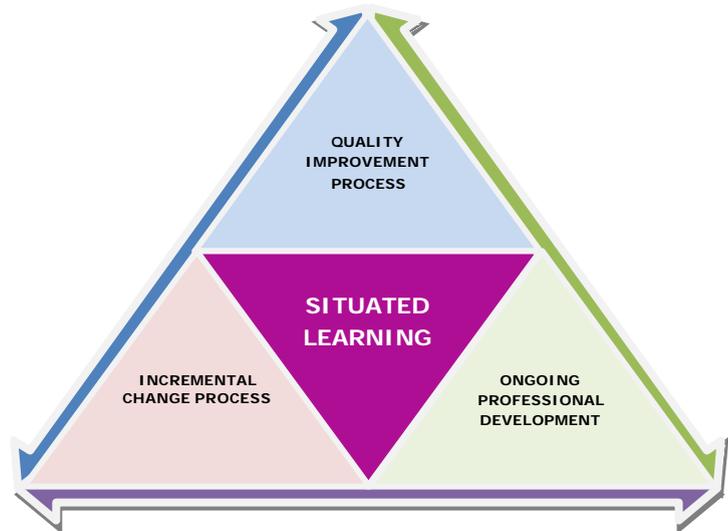
Lave & Wenger (1990) describe situated-learning as learning which:

- takes place in an authentic environment and, ideally, the setting and context in which that learning would normally be applied;
- is **facilitated** by interaction and collaboration between colleagues (i.e. a community of practice);
- cannot be achieved in a organisational setting, without the consent of all stakeholders.

(Note the 'hearts and minds' issue inherent in the latter bullet point.)

As adult learners themselves, teachers want to know that any new training requirement is relevant to real and immediate issues and that it will actually deliver the support required, in the way they wish to receive it. Speck (1996:pp36-37) argues that any professional development activity designed for educators should take full account of adult learning theory. Sadly, however, some short-courses have dubious relevance, and many fail to deliver (why is it that as experts in teaching and learning, we repeatedly fail our own staff in this way?). Situated-Learning is so powerful, because it is automatically grounded in current professional practice and the participants in the learning are, of necessity, the architects of it.

Situated Learning draws participants into a shared sense of purpose and creates a three-way alignment of staff development, incremental change and quality improvement. Rowden (2001:p117) describes “a model of strategic change in which everyone is engaged in identifying and solving problems so that the organisation is continuously changing, experimenting and improving, thus increasing its capacity to grow and achieve its purpose.” This is what you get when everyone within



the institution is actively - and proactively - engaged in team-based, situated learning.

### CENTRES FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHER TRAINING

CETTs were created to improve the quality and capacity of teacher education, both *initial* and *continuing*. The way we do professional education is the most important factor underpinning staff and whole organisational performance making it an issue of major importance for both CETTS and colleges. Whole-college-success is a natural consequence of a (staff) learning culture that embraces the ‘right type of’ professional development and that this is what EMCETT and LSIS are here to support.

Some may argue that college performance is about more than the right type of staff development and needs to consider, for example, financial performance, employer engagement, target achievement and other things. This however misses the point, namely, that high performance in each of these areas relies on high performing staff, working in concert, and this is ultimately achieved through a willingness of all staff – and that includes managers – to engage in on-going situated learning. ‘Willingness’ is a matter of hearts and minds and therefore the fundamental purpose of leadership.

Peter Senge (1990:P3) says much the same thing in describing learning organisations “where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to learn together”

### Why is team-based learning so important?

High performing organisations are the product of high performing teams, not high performing individuals. Eleven prima donna footballers do not guarantee a winning team; teachers who are excellent within their individual classrooms do not guarantee an excellent college, although it is clearly a good start.

Katzenberg & Smith (1998:12-13) assert that "any team - if it focuses on performance regardless of where it is in an organisation or what it does - will deliver results well beyond what individuals acting alone in non-team working situations could achieve."

Most 'so called' *teams* would be better described as *workgroups*, frequently failing to achieve any real synergy, at best, and dysfunctional, at worst. Reporting to the same manager does not make a 'team' and neither does doing the same type of work. Team working is something more than this and requires a persuasive catalyst or imperative if

it is to survive longer than the *norming* and *storming* stages of team development. The trick is therefore to create that imperative, and that requires a whole organisational approach in which an expectation of collaborative development is hard-wired into:

- job descriptions and person specifications;
- professional development reviews or performance appraisals;
- systems for recognising and rewarding performance.

Katzenberg & Smith (1998:173) note that senior management teams may face a particular challenge in establishing their own team purpose, goals and work-products for which they can hold themselves accountable as a team. They further point out that, "nothing is more corrosive to a company's performance ethic than a pseudo-team at the top".

Individually targeted professional development maybe good for individuals but it is potentially flawed as a method of organisational development. Note that individual expertise stays 'individual' unless it is liberated through collaborative working. Team-based training, grounded in current professional practice, on the other hand, leads to communities of practice that are far more

Target or Focus of Professional Development	
Teams	Individuals
Professional knowledge and skills are liberated and shared	Knowledge and skills become individual commodities and sometimes power-bases
Team development aligns more naturally with organisational development	Individual development is easily divorced from team and organisational development needs.
Shared sense of purpose	Individual interests and agendas
Impact is on-going and much easier to measure	Impact requires effective follow-up and is much harder to measure

impactful on organisational performance than individual excellence, alone. Team-based development trumps individually-based development in all ways when it comes to building sustainable high performance through incremental, rather than revolutionary, process of change.

## Hearts and Minds

High performing colleges (or any organisation, for that matter) are simply not possible without the **willingness** of staff to align behind a common sense of purpose and priorities. This is a 'hearts and minds' matter. Chair of LSIS and former Principal of Lewisham, Dame Ruth Silver (2005) has defined her approach to management as "*getting things done through, with, and by others*". She further defines leadership as "*developing the capacity to win hearts*" and believes that "*you cannot buy a heart, you cannot instruct a heart – that actually you really do have to win hearts, for the primary purpose of the organisation, for the decorum, the professional decorum you want to see in there....*" (Reported in Jameson, 2008: p5)

Winning *hearts and minds* is clearly a full-time occupation and requires a whole organisational approach. Failures in this respect quickly damage staff confidence and morale. This is more than a 'touchy-feely' issue given that significant research within further education colleges, carried out over the last eight years, has revealed a disturbing picture of low staff morale, poor staff satisfaction and even institutional bullying (see Grayling, 2009: p11-12).

As stated above, Lave & Wenger (1990) believe that situated learning cannot be achieved in a organisational setting, without the consent of all stakeholders. This then requires an almost ruthless – if not a contradiction in terms - pursuit of hearts and minds in which peer-supported and team-based engagement with real and current quality issues is the cornerstone of the organisation's value-base, policy and procedures.

## A Thought Experiment

The statements to the right are hypothetical, 'what if' scenarios; they are not proposed as position statements (although, with some moderation, they might be). EMCETT challenges SMTs to consider each of these statements and to discuss what impact each of these 'approaches' would have singly and, then, in combination.

1. 'Short courses are banned – all staff development must be driven by real-issues occurring in real-time.'
2. 'CPD as an isolated, individual activity is no longer encouraged. It must now be achieved through collaboration with colleagues.'
3. 'Job Descriptions must now also emphasise responsibilities to support colleagues, the team and the organisation. This will also be reinforced through PDR/Appraisal processes '
4. 'Staff development objectives must first be defined only at the team level. Individual development targets can only be determined in the context of team development needs.'
5. 'Recognition and reward is linked to, and dependent on, team performance not individual performance. This applies to managers and team leaders too.'

## High Performance (Magic Dust) Self-Assessment

The following organisational self-assessment tool is not intended to be a robust scientific test but it is based on evidence-based principles.

		Circle one of the five positions
1	To what extent do staff appraisal targets emphasise individuals' goals or individuals' contributions to team goals?	Individual    About 50/50    Team
2	Where do staff understand the main accountability for performance to lie?	Line Manager    Whole Team    Themselves
3	To what level would a random sample of (non-SMT) staff be definitely able to describe their 'sense of purpose', guiding principles/values and key priorities?	Their Own    Their Team's    Whole Organisation
4	Who empowers staff to get involved in quality improvement initiatives?	Line-Manager    Self-Directed    Senior Mgt Team
5	To what extent is CPD peer-supported (e.g. via mentors, subject learning coaches, critical friends or the wider team)?	Never    Sometimes    Always
6	What is the context for most CPD delivery?	Professional Practice    Mixture of Both    Short Courses
7	To what extent are teams expected to spend time identifying and collectively dealing with shared issues of quality?	Never    Occasionally    Frequently
8	What is the relative proportion of individual and team-based requirements in Job Descriptions and Person Specs?	Team-Based    About 50/50    Individual-Based
9	How often is team-performance formally recognised (and/or rewarded)?	Never    Sometimes (ad hoc)    Always
10	How are the Quality Management and Staff Development roles related?	Same Post    Work Closely    Work Separately

Score odd questions (1,3,5,etc) 

Score even questions (2,4,6,etc) 

Your total 'Magic Dust' Score

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## How does your institution fare?

Total Score			
0 - 10	11 - 20	21 - 30	31 - 40
Staff need to be empowered to engage in team-based and peer-supported quality improvement.	There are pockets of situated learning but these need to be actively promoted by the SMT and replicated more widely.	A number of the building blocks of high performance are in place. These need to be integrated into a whole organisational approach.	You have the basis for sustainable high performance. Strategy, vision, values and internal procedures (e.g. QA, HR, etc) should all reinforce the message.

## The National (LSIS) Teaching & Learning Programme

Currently, LSIS promotes and funds 15 components of its Teaching and Learning Programme (including the CETTs), all of which embed the principles of situated-learning and peer support (see, <http://tlp.excellencegateway.org.uk/teachingandlearning/#>). An organisation-wide culture and practice of situated-learning will enable you and your college to exploit the LSIS offer more fully and more effectively in building sustainable high performance.

## References

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