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Ripple effect: today's leaders

Local Government Improvement & Development and Shared Intelligence have evaluated five programmes commissioned by the Local Government Group as part of its Productive Places programme. The full report is yet to be published but early conclusions are that such programmes work only if chief executives and senior management get involved. The authors also conclude that leadership development should be commissioned across sectors – a significant shift from current practice

The need for different agencies to work together at a local level remains as vital as ever. Support within local and central government for community budgets is just one example of this trend. Yet in an era of fewer national rules and less money councils and their partners are reviewing their partnership structures, many of which have become elaborate and expensive.

Without the safety net of multiple committees and groups, effective collaboration will hinge on trust between individuals and the organisations concerned. A new

generation of leadership development programmes has as its primary objective the building of robust relationships between organisations and sectors.

The evidence from the five Leadership Development in Place Programmes (LDIP) is that they are achieving that objective (see In Practice, opposite).

The programmes we looked at were very diverse, ranging from a bespoke version of a Warwick Business School programme, provided for participants from Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, to a developmental programme

in Cambridgeshire. The programmes mirror one of the dictums of place-based working: that one size does not fit all.

In common with all leadership development programmes, these were designed to develop the skills and understanding of the participants. The LDIP programmes, however, also set out to have an impact on the development of the organisations from which participants were drawn and the wider place and local public service system.

A common feature of these programmes is that they are aimed at participants from across the whole range of local public bodies and the private and voluntary sectors. In addition participants are drawn from a particular place, ranging in size from a county to a region. All the evidence shows that the

cross-organisational focus of these programmes is critically important.

New networks and trusting and sustainable relationships are being built. Misconceptions about other organisations are being overturned. Hence our recommendation that in future all leadership development should be commissioned in a cross-organisational context. This does not mean that no service or organisation-specific programmes should be commissioned, but that the wider picture should always be at the centre of commissioners' minds.

Another important conclusion from our work is that the wider impact of these programmes is influenced by the local political, cultural and organisational context.

Imagine throwing a pebble in a pond. The size of the

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can help shape the future

ripples is determined not just by the size of the pebble, but by the depth and shape of the pond. So the impact of programmes such as these is influenced by the role and seniority of the participants (the size of the pebble) and the organisational culture and its openness to change (the shape of the pond).

Organisational buy-in and support for these programmes is critical. If local political and managerial leaders are not active supporters, their impact will be limited. In short, programmes to develop the leaders of tomorrow depend on the support and contribution of the leaders of today.

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IN PRACTICE: LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN PLACE

Making Cambridgeshire Count

A group of 'animateurs' played a key role, acting as roving change agents, encouraging local leaders to think in new ways. Launched at a world café-style event, this was very much a leadership development process rather than a programme. At the core were a number of projects commissioned at the launch event. Action learning and leadership development were structured around the needs of the groups working on the projects. The approach was designed to generate disturbance and create the conditions for change. Participants say they are far better able to manage complexity. Discussions among partners are far more honest than they were, and the place now has its own leadership development capacity with reduced expenditure on external support.

Kent Executive Leaders Programme

A two-day crisis simulation, an international visit and action learning visits to places ranging from Veresus to the Institute for Government are important features of the Kent programme. They sit alongside five taught modules and a group project. Originally delivered by Kent University and Imperial College, the programme is now delivered in-house. Cost, flexibility and the importance of providing personal support for senior participants were factors in the decision to change. The group project, which in the current cohort focused on

how to make a reality of place-based working in Kent, is seen as delivering real value to the place. Participants say they have enhanced their skills in relation to leadership, strategic thinking and partnership working.

Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Leadership in Place Programme

Warwick Business School's kudos is undoubtedly a major draw for participants on the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland programme. Aimed at middle managers and the leaders of the future, the programme includes one bespoke module, co-designed by the university and the local commissioners. The area covered by the programme is a complex one, including both unitary and two-tier local government, a rural county and a very diverse city. The police were instrumental in the development of the programme and are particularly enthusiastic participants in it. Those taking part and their managers report significant personal development. There is evidence that long-lasting relationships have been established across organisational boundaries, and widespread confidence that the programme will contribute to long-term cultural change.

Sheffield City Region Leadership Programme

The result of a unique partnership between two local universities, the Sheffield City Region programme combines a very practical focus with a robust

academic underpinning. The programme was co-designed by the universities and the commissioners to meet the particular needs of the city region. It is aimed at the future leaders of the city across the public, private and voluntary sectors. The first cohorts have not yet completed the programme, but there is already evidence of new relationships being established within and between organisations. In addition work on topics such as 'contact us once' and the process for Criminal Records Bureau checks are already delivering a financial return.

North East IEP Inspiring Partnerships Module

This module shows that it is possible for a short, low-cost development programme to have an impact. Aimed at graduates of the North East Excellent Manager Programme, the module focuses specifically on partnership behaviour and culture. It lasts two days and more than 190 participants have benefited from it. The programme includes an input from champions from across the region, enabling participants to learn at first-hand what it takes to deliver effective partnership working. Participants and their managers report enhanced competencies and the former leave the programme committed to working differently with other organisations and sectors.