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Evaluating the skills strategy through a Graduate Certificate in Management

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An experiential learning theory approach

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to evaluate how a UK business school is addressing the Government's skills strategy through its Graduate Certificate in Management, and to identify good practice and development needs and to clarify how the Graduate Certificate is adapting to the needs of Generation X and Millennial students. The paper also aims to test Kolb and Kolb's experiential learning theory (ELT) in a business school setting.

Design/methodology/approach – A case study methodology was adopted. In order to get a cross-section of views and triangulate the data, three focus groups were held, supported by reading documentation about the programme of study.

Findings – The skills strategy is not just an ambition for some business schools, but is already part of the curriculum. Generation X and the Millennials have more in common with the positive attitudes associated with older generations than stereotyped views might allow. ELT provides a useful theoretical framework for evaluating a programme of study and student attitudes.

Research limitations/implications – The research findings from one case study are reported, limiting the generalisability of the study.

Practical implications – Good practice and development needs are identified which support the implementation of the Government's skills strategy and address employer concerns about student skills.

Originality/value – New empirical data are reported which supports the use of ELT in evaluating programmes of study and student attitudes to work.

Keywords Skills, Workplace learning, Business schools, Experiential learning, Students, United Kingdom

Paper type Case study

Introduction

Interest in undergraduate business education has increased dramatically in the last 30 years for both students and employers (Wilton, 2008). Students gather both technical skills (the accumulation of knowledge specific to the discipline studied) and non-technical skills (the competences which facilitate acquiring jobs) (Cassidy, 2006). Students' expectations include increasing professional skills to enhance employability (Connor and Shaw, 2008). Employers perceive that graduates will overcome issues such as the low representation of managers with higher level qualifications and the relative lack of managerial and technical skills in the workplace (Wilton, 2008). The interest in education has contributed to:

[...] institutional improvement that enhanced student learning and involved faculty development (Hurtado, 2009, p. 28).



Cotton (2001) argues that although employers are in general pleased with the technical skills of new graduates, they are less persuaded that the non-technical skills are at high standards. Specific areas of concern are team working, problem solving, communication and attitude to work (Connor and Shaw, 2008). Employers believe that universities ought to develop the employability skills of students (Cassidy, 2006).

In a recent contribution to the skills agenda, in 2009, the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) issued a policy document titled *Higher Ambitions*, which seeks to clarify the future of universities in a knowledge economy and is already being widely implemented. Its clear aim states:

In order to attract a greater diversity of students, more part-time study, more vocationally-based foundation degrees, more work-based study and more study whilst living at home must be made available. This is a core aim of these proposals, and our wider skills strategy (BIS, 2009, p. 4).

The purpose of this study is to evaluate a programme of study already addressing the skills strategy in order to identify good practice and lessons that can be learnt for business schools. A key issue is age, given that the attitude to work of Generation X and the Millennials is questioned (Connor and Shaw, 2008). The evaluation is achieved by using Kolb and Kolb's (2005) experiential learning theory (ELT). ELT has been selected because experiential learning is at the heart of *Higher Ambitions*, with its drive for vocationally based and work-based study. ELT also captures the move to student reflective learning (Higson and Bullivant, 2006). Kolb and Kolb (2005) describe learning as a new science, and it is important to test how robust ELT is in practice. In short, three research questions are asked. The first evaluates how Salford Business School is addressing the skills strategy through its Graduate Certificate in Management, identifying good practice and development needs. The second investigates how the Graduate Certificate is adapting to Generation X and the Millennials. Finally, the third tests how well Kolb and Kolb's (2005) ELT assists in the evaluation.

The contribution of the paper is to reveal that *Higher Ambitions* is not just an ambition for some business schools, that Generation X and the Millennials have more in common with the positive attitudes associated with older generations than stereotyped views might allow and that ELT provides a useful theoretical framework for evaluating the diffusion of the skills strategy.

After introducing ELT, it is then related to the characteristics and values of different generations of stakeholders within higher education. The choice of the case study method will be discussed and the research findings are reported using ELT. The analysis will return to and expand on the research questions and contributions highlighted above.

Experiential learning theory

Kolb and Kolb (2005, p. 193) define ELT as a "philosophy of education". ELT is derived from previous work on the experiential learning cycle. The learning cycle starts with learners involved in an experience. They carefully analyse this experience, trying to fully understand all its aspects. They meditate and reach certain conclusions, by filtering through their own ideas. These conclusions are followed by choices and actions which will engage new experiments.

The learning cycle is itself developed from a variety of sources including John Dewey (Miettinen, 2000; Kolb and Kolb, 2005). Miettinen (2000, p. 54) argues that the learning

cycle is a misunderstanding of Dewey's ideas and it is "epistemologically problematic". It fails to identify a hypothesis that would link together the phases in the learning cycle.

Nevertheless, the learning cycle is widely used because it supports the belief that a person is gifted with a natural ability to mature and learn (Miettinen, 2000). The learning cycle represents the foundation of the experiential learning. For this reason, it has been used to expand theories about organizational learning (Dixon, 1994), transferring the focus from the instructor to the learner (Kelly, 1997) and leadership training and cognitive processing styles (Miettinen, 2000).

ELT is a recent development of the learning cycle. ELT is an appropriate theory for this study because experiential learning is at the heart of Higher Ambitions, students are expected to be reflective learners and it is important to test how robust ELT is in practice, especially given Miettinen's (2000) critique. ELT contains six factors, though not all of them need to take place at the same time. Learning focuses on the process itself, not on results. In other words, students' learning is central and it comprises getting feedback on the success of their learning. Learning takes place when students mix their own thoughts and principles about an issue with other ideas through investigation, probing and incorporating these ideas with novel, innovative and improved ones. Learning is a process of solving tensions between different strategies to adjust to the learning environment. Learning does not just reside in cognition, but it includes reflection, experience, observation and action, in other words, adaptation to the world is a holistic process. Learning leads from the exchange between people and their environment. Finally, learning is the way of generating knowledge.

ELT suggests that gaining and revising experience is fundamental in the learning process. The framework mixes past and new data so that learners can recognise and manipulate their skills and the opportunities they encounter (Corbett, 2005).

ELT is limited in that the outcomes lead from learners' evaluating themselves. Assessment is not through a standard inventory and it does not see the individual learner in comparison with others (Kelly, 1997). Rogers (1996, p. 108) argues that learning consists of "goals, purposes, intentions, choice and decision-making", and their place within the learning cycle is ambiguous.

Age and values

Within higher education, a critical issue is responding to the needs of younger students, Generation X and the Millennials. There is little consensus regarding what values define each generation (Donnison, 2007). Notter (2002) has created a typology associating each generation to a set of values (Table I).

Matures are focused mainly on traditional values: dedication, sacrifice and hard work, conformity and the other values in Table I. For them, education is a privilege and leisure activities are perceived as a compensation for diligence (Notter, 2002).

Boomers represent the highest proportion of people employed, 45 per cent (Notter, 2002). Characterised as self-absorbed, for them education is a legacy and not a privilege. Their core values include optimism, team orientation and personal gratification.

The term Generation X was introduced by Coupland (1991) in his novel *Generation X*. They are the MTV Generation. Characterized as "loners and individualists, with almost anti-organizational attitudes" (Estienne, 1997, p. 195), they have a distrustful and sceptical attitude towards work, business, careers and have an "It's only a job attitude" (Zemke, 2001, p. 5). Core values include diversity, thinking globally and balance.

Generation	Born	Age now	Values
Matures	1920-1940	70-90	Dedication Sacrifice and hard work Conformity Law and order Respect for authority Patience Delayed reward Duty before pleasure Adherence to rules
Boomers	1940-1960	50-70	Optimism Team orientation Personal gratification Health and wellness Personal growth Youth Work and involvement
Generation X	1960-1980	30-50	Diversity Thinking globally Balance Techno-literacy Fun and informality Self-reliance Pragmatism
Millennials	1980-2000	10-30	Optimism and civic duty Confidence Achievement Sociability Morality Street smarts Diversity

Table I.
Different category
of cohorts according
to their age and values

Source: Adapted from Notter (2002, p. 2)

Millennials are also known as Generation Y and Generation 2000 (Donnison, 2007). They are characterized as having an inclination towards digital media and to establish associations (Donnison, 2007). Core values include optimism and civic duty, confidence and achievement. Donnison (2007) suggests that employers should regulate their expectations and work procedures to take account of the millennial tendency to want immediate outcomes, have lack of attention and have a predisposition towards boredom. Zemke (2001) is more pessimistic, such behaviour causes problems, leading to an unrealistic evaluation of their capabilities and skills and an idealistic employment expectation. In terms of higher education, if learning is not directed towards personal employment development it is rejected.

Applying Donnison's (2007) view more widely, Westerman and Yamamura (2007) show that employers ought to continuously put in balance the expectations that graduates have and the actual work conditions. Balance can be created through permanent training and learning at work, not only in education units (Green, 2000).

Method

The research design adopted is a critical case study. Yin (1984, p. 23) defines the case study method as:

[...] an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used.

This method enables an investigation of a contemporary education policy issue and its implementation, that is to say, an in-depth evaluation of a programme of study already addressing the skills strategy and the attitude to work of Generation X and the Millennials.

The case study focuses on a Graduate Certificate in Management within a UK business school (Salford). Salford Business School was selected because the lead author was appointed its first CAMPUS Learning and Teaching Fellow in 2008. The Graduate Certificate was selected because the programme directly addresses the skills strategy and the liaison contact at the business school taught on the programme of study.

The certificate sits between the undergraduate and postgraduate levels in order to prepare existing managers for an MSc, and the intention is to improve the skills and knowledge of the students both academically and practically, for personal career progression and improved organisational performance. The target student has not necessarily followed the traditional path of further education leading to study for an undergraduate degree. Although the lecturers are all Boomers, there are 20 students on the course and from a variety of generations: one Boomer, eight Generation X and 11 Millennials. They also have a variety of jobs (some are unemployed) (Table II).

The certificate is organized around four themes: managing activities, management principles, managing people and managing resources. The intended learning outcomes are divided in two categories (Table III).

In order to get a cross-section of views about the Certificate and triangulate the data, three focus groups were held, supported by reading documentation about the programme of study (Yin, 1984). The first focus group consisted of two lecturers (one then interviewed a third who could not make the focus group), the second six students,

Interviewee	Work experience
1	Managing a youth inclusion project for a voluntary sector organisation
2	Working at the City Council and a project manager on the Capital Programme Division
3	Working for Rochdale Council, supervisor in the office
4	Social worker and the registered manager at his fostering agency
5	Working in an NHS hospital
6	Working for DHL in the planning division
7	Unemployed
8	Team leader in a call centre
9	Project manager for the City Council
10	Working for Co-operative Group
11	Unemployed
12	Team manager for a finance organisation
13	Team leader in a customer service centre
14	Unemployed

Table II.
Interviewee's work status

Knowledge and understanding	Transferable/key skills and other attributes
Recognise the complex and differentiated nature of the management of the organisations in which they work, the environment in which they operate and the interactions resulting	Work individually to clarify objectives and evaluate data in terms of the problems presented
Analyse and evaluate the various approaches to the effective utilisation of financial resources	Work in teams to clarify objectives, exchange ideas and knowledge and evaluate contributions in terms of the problems presented
Review, contrast and evaluate the various approaches to the management of individuals and teams, motivation, leadership and problem solving	Locate and synthesise information from a range of published literature and electronic sources and present this effectively both verbally and in writing
Identify and action areas for individual self-development	Take responsibility for personal learning and continuous professional development and produce a personal development plan to measure progress against personal objectives set
Manage their own learning and make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources available as well as critically reflecting on the managerial practices of other participants	Manage their time to meet deadlines in both group discussions and in the preparation of in-class and work-based activities and assessed course work
Differentiate between communication strategies to identify the appropriateness to context	Communicate effectively through a variety of media to different audiences
Critically evaluate the approaches available to effectively communicate information, argument, viewpoint and analysis to a variety of audiences	Solve problems effectively using appropriate qualitative and quantitative skills

Table III.
Learning outcomes

and the third eight students. A random sample was interviewed which did not include the Boomer, self-selected by availability. The interviewer focused on identifying good practice and lessons that can be learnt, but the participants were able raise issues as they wished. More specifically, three research questions were asked:

RQ1. How is Salford Business School addressing the skills strategy through its Graduate Certificate in Management, and what good practice and development needs can be identified?

RQ2. How is the Graduate Certificate adapting to Generation X and the Millennials?

RQ3. Does Kolb and Kolb's (2005) ELT assist in the evaluation?

The interviews were recorded and then transcribed. The interviews were analysed in Nvivo and coding was related to ELT, the underpinning theory for this study, and some additional categories such as student approach to study.

The research design means that the results are reliable because they are "repeatable" (Bryman and Bell, 2007, p. 40). This means that the research methods used are replicable and can be repeated again by someone else. However, because the evaluation focuses on a single programme of study within one business school, validity and generalisability can be enhanced with future research. Validity is "concerned with the integrity of the conclusions that are generated" (Bryman and Bell, 2007, p. 41). Although there is face validity in the sense that the students know what is being measured (their view of the certificate programme they are studying), because of the relatively small sample size, the study captures the students' individual thoughts at one point in time, which may vary at another time (several years after the certificate is finished). As a consequence, this is an exploratory study revealing suggested paths for future research.

Until this is done, the results of the study have limited generalisability beyond the specific research context (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Nevertheless, the research provided a richness of data, consistent with the case study method, about individual student and lecturer experiences of developing transferable skills.

Effectiveness of learning can be measured through feedback

The research findings are reported using the factors within ELT. Feedback is highly valued by students, because it is associated with improving the quality of an assignment:

I certainly emailed X once and actually seen Y with my assignment and they've given me feedback. And that's probably improved my grade and given me a better understanding of the actual topic just by going and talking to them (Student).

For me the feedback, regardless of the topic, would be beneficial because it's not all to do with the content, it's to do with the structure, it's to do with the style, it's to do with where you go and get your references (Student).

Unexpectedly, some students linked feedback to past experiences of school attendance lists:

I presumed that when I came, they take an attendance list every day when I was here to check who was here, who wasn't here, and that would get feedback maybe to your organisation [...] I'm a bit surprised about that aspect of it really (Student).

Lecturers perceive feedback as being linked to ability – some students manage to progress without much support, whilst others need examples of how a theory can be applied in practice:

[...] the divide tends to be on ability, that there's a group that needed to have the context explained to them in terms of the theories and you had to say this is how it might work in the transport industry [...] Others took the concept and were able to apply it for themselves (Lecturer).

All learning is relearning

Returning to education, students have re-evaluated their approach to study, focusing on completing assignments has given way to a focus on learning and independent study:

When I was at university [...] the night before I'll do my assignment because I was too busy enjoying university life. Now I've got older and I've come back to learning, I actually want to be able to learn (Student).

[...] with essays, even if you haven't actually got the knowledge, a lot of it you can acquire (Student).

However, some students still focus on assignments an indicator of a surface approach to study. One assignment is submitted in the middle of the term, which is followed by a decrease in attendance:

[...] both the assignments [...] if you stopped attending after the material was directly covered on the modules, you're probably about a third of the way through and that's it, nothing that was taught after that was directly relevant to the assignments (Student).

I mean x came once to do his lecture and there was like 4 people here and he'd done a lot of work. I just felt awful for him (Student).

Lecturers acknowledge that there is a range of approaches to study, though there is a focus on getting qualifications:

The purpose of attending is to get the qualification rather than to learn [...] a very pragmatic approach; "I want this because I want the qualification" [...] The opposite of pragmatic I suppose is that they are interested in learning for its own sake (Lecturer).

Learning is a result of conflict, differences and disagreement

Students identified two areas of tension: lecturing style and administration. There is a satisfaction with some of the teaching methods:

There's a lot of handouts given, all the modules give a lot of handouts. He used the PowerPoint presentation well (Student).

More traditional approaches are less well responded to:

I think they just found it boring (Student).

It's fairly kind of flat really, fairly quietly spoken, you know, he's quietly spoken, fairly flat. No jokes, not many jokes, unlike some comedians. So it's fairly traditional, mainstream, stand up, deliver, outline on the whiteboard (Student).

Lecturers are conscious of the need for student engagement, but are not always able to change:

I've always wanted dialogue (Lecturer).

I think it's fairly static (pedagogy) (Lecturer).

With part time students, administrative support is seen as a core service and a range of issues are highlighted:

Definitely the course has to enhance the administration bit that they do. The induction, the letters they send out, because they're facing direct customers aren't they? (Student).

[...] there wasn't a formal way of welcome, this is what it's all going to be about, this is the intranet, this is how you use it, this is the library. It kind of happened on an *ad hoc* basis because we kept asking (Student).

[...] when we started we weren't even given passwords to get onto Athens, we were halfway through (Student).

[...] you expect more from a Business School (Student).

Lecturers see the tension emerging from the diversity of student backgrounds, specifically multiculturalism:

[...] you've got a number of different cultures there, some Eastern Europeans who tend to be quite hard working [...] that's an increasing trend [...] Not purely Eastern Europeans by any means, Spaniards, Italians, French, German (Lecturer).

They're in a slightly different culture and don't feel able to take such "liberties" whereas the British ones tend to know what liberties they can take (Lecturer).

Learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world

Learning leads from synergetic transactions between the person and the environment

Two of Kolb and Kolb's (2005) concepts have been combined because of their similarity in integrating learning with the environment in which it takes place. Both students and lecturers interpret adaptation to the world as employability. Permanent changes in the workplace mean that continuous personal professional development is seen as a strategy to overcome the increase in the number of graduates every year and employers' high expectations. At the student level, they are motivated by the course being recommended:

[...] a colleague of mine had done this course previously and actually recommended the course as being a good basic course to do (Student).

[...] my boss actually looked at the leaflet and said this sounds really good so they sent me on it (Student).

Having joined the programme, it positively influences performance into the workplace:

I'm a team manager and why I chose this was to see the theoretical side of management (Student).

I found a lot of the content that we've done, I've actually covered it in work. It's been really helpful for me to go back to work and apply some of the things that I've heard (Student).

On the other side, work pressures can lead to drop outs from the course:

My colleague has dropped off and his is purely because of commitment from work, they're not giving him enough time really to attend (Student).

Lecturers are keen for part-time students to apply what they study to their workplace:

I always encourage part time students to relate to their own organizations so there is an individualised "unique reality" for each student (Lecturer).

More than that, there is mutual learning:

I believe in a mutually beneficial exchange of learning [...] I learn how the practical application of the theoretical models works in practice, so students get the theory from me, and I get the practice from them – it helps with job satisfaction for me. Sometimes I lecture at them too much, but I find the more I get to discuss, the happier I am. I don't find standard lectures as rewarding (Lecturer).

However, there is a feeling that the education process is changing and keeping up is challenging:

I think there is definitely a culture change, whether I've particularly adapted I'm not quite sure because I've no particular career path that I'm on (Lecturer).

Learning is the process of creating knowledge

Interpreting creating knowledge as addressing the skills agenda, students are aware of the amount of information they gather:

I feel like I've been definitely equipped with more stuff than when I came. I did a development course through work in parallel with doing this and I was just transferring so much stuff that I was learning on the course (Student).

They are also aware of the efforts of the lecturers and the value of education:

[...] in terms of delivering the lectures, I think they tried to do their best and I also think that was exceptional (Student).

Discussion

The results will be interpreted by critically answering the three research questions (Yin, 1984). The answers will be set in the policy context of the contribution that the Graduate Certificate in Management is making to regional economic development (BIS, 2009). The *RQI* asked how is Salford Business School addressing the skills strategy, and what good practice and development needs can be identified? The Graduate Certificate clearly addresses the skills strategy outlined in *Higher Ambitions*. The majority of students already work in the North West region, which means that the programme of study and the teaching methods encourage the development of transferable skills and the application of theory to individual work-based contexts. The key constituents of the programme are those who moved into work straight from school, but feel that in order to remain competitive in the market place, that they need more professional and academic development.

However, the skills strategy is addressed more by accident than design because the certificate has been running since September 2001. It must be questioned to what extent the certificate responds to current employers needs in developing the employability skills of students (Cassidy, 2006). There is no obvious evidence that the specific areas of concern outlined by Connor and Shaw (2008), those of team working, problem solving, communication and attitude to work, are being addressed.

Nevertheless, the strengths of the certificate can be summarised by the student who stated, "I was just transferring so much stuff that I was learning on the course". This has led to recommendations for the programme from both alumni and employers. Lecturers are seen to doing their best, notably in giving feedback on the content and style of assignments, which is highly praised. This is supported by the use of engaging teaching methods, good handouts and PowerPoint. It is clear that the certificate facilitates individual student progress and their knowledge enhancement (Egan, 1997).

The certificate could be improved in three key areas. First, although engaging teaching methods are used, some lecturers still use traditional approaches which are perceived more negatively. Lecturers are conscious of this reaction, but feel that they are not always able to change. A constant review of the range of pedagogical methods and specific training in them might ameliorate the situation. Second, given that the majority of students work and measure performance in customer care terms, the induction process could be changed to address the specific concerns raised by the students:

- the letters that are sent out;
- a review of the formal welcome introducing university services (though this may be for the student cohort joining in January); and
- when Athens passwords are given out.

Third, the hand in dates for some assignments currently leads to a decrease in attendance, which probably only affects those students with a narrow conception of study. It is important, though, over the course of a module to maintain the engagement of all students.

Many of the issues raised by students are traditional concerns about the running of a programme. Higher education must also be about effective learning (Race, 2007).

In a recent executive briefing co-published by the Association of Business Schools (ABS) and the Advanced Institute of Management Research (AIM), four models and orientations of activity for the future business school were identified. One of the models, “liberal arts”, is defined as:

In the *liberal arts* school model the word “liberal” refers to the fundamentals of knowledge, self-knowledge, wisdom and leadership, and “art”, refers to the practice and application of these factors. (Ivory *et al.*, 2007, p. 11).

It is not clear from the data, including the documentary sources, if students are acquiring the fundamentals of a liberal arts education, for example, is the epistemological reasoning of the students changing. Students may be locked into thinking that knowledge is absolute, it is simply factually either right or wrong and believe that their lecturers’ duty is to convey this knowledge (Baxter Magolda, 1992). Or does the certificate change conceptions of knowledge (Pizzolato, 2003). Do the students begin to realise that knowledge can be uncertain and there are many different areas which need to be explored in order to get the best answer, in other words, they move on from thinking that lecturers have the right answers.

The *RQ2* asked how is Salford Business School adapting to Generation X and the Millennials. Lecturers are fully aware of the increasingly diverse groups of students. They acknowledge, for example, that students come with different educational backgrounds and diverse skills and capabilities. What is interesting is that Notter’s (2002) generational values do not seem to hold up in this sample of students, suggesting that stereotypes should be avoided about Generation X and the Millennials. In our study, they do not have a distrustful and sceptical attitude towards work (Zemke, 2001). In contrast, they seem to have similar characteristics to the Matures and Boomers, for instance, dedication and optimism (Notter, 2002). Whilst it is agreed that employers ought to continuously put in balance the expectations that graduates have and the actual work conditions (Westerman and Yamamura, 2007), it is not agreed that Generation X and the Millennials should be a special need (Donnison, 2007), rather, individual development plans are more appropriate.

The *RQ3* asked does Kolb and Kolb’s (2005) ELT assist in this evaluation. ELT can be applied to the certificate, but other programmes of study will have to be researched before suggesting that it can be generalised to the UK higher education sector. ELT surfaces tensions between students and with lecturers. Students complained about other students not turning up to lectures once assignments had been completed, an approach to study consistent with the belief that a lecturer’s duty is to convey knowledge (Baxter Magolda, 1992). Lecturers are aware that students can be focused on getting qualifications and would like this pragmatic approach to change, but there is no clear conception of learning being deployed.

The limitation with ELT is that the fourth and the fifth factor were analysed together, suggesting from a theoretical standpoint that they are currently not conceptually distinct enough for empirical work. This reinforces Miettinen’s (2000) critique that the learning cycle, in its current ELT incarnation, fails to identify a hypothesis that would underpin the six factors comprising ELT.

In an era in which Van Fleet and Peterson (2005) claim that the value of teaching is still comprehended as being low and not easily exchangeable from institution to institution, ELT may be part of the solution for developing and applying a revised

infrastructure comparable to the one used in research. When deployed, ELT captures the experience of learning and teaching both from the student and lecturer viewpoints.

Concluding remarks

The contribution of the paper is threefold. First, it reveals that Higher Ambitions is not just an ambition – there are programmes of study that already exist in this policy area. When new government policy is advocated, it is important to identify and evaluate those programmes, so that good practice can be diffused and not reinvented. This is especially true in environments of retrenchment management within the public services. In this case study, though students gather technical skills (the accumulation of knowledge), it is not clear if they are gathering higher order skills (for example, team working) (Cassidy, 2006). Second, Generation X and the Millennials have more in common with the positive attitudes associated with older generations than stereotyped views might allow. The results presented here concur with Senge's (1998) positive argument that human beings of all ages are designed for learning, with an insatiable drive to explore and experiment. Third and last, ELT provides a useful theoretical framework for evaluating the diffusion of the skills strategy, a programme of study and student attitudes.

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