

Participant 3

Academic lead, WBL project

What approaches have been tried to capture lessons learned in the HE setting? Which approaches have worked best?

How many of the challenges faced by projects in implementation had been identified in advance as part of the planning?

Interviewer

At the start of the project, what did you see as the main challenges you would face?

Participant 3

Personal: limited prior experience of projects and management

Project: working with other partners in the consortium

Interviewer

How confident were you that the project would succeed?

Participant 3

Very confident. Confident that demand was there, and would be able to deliver. "I was extremely confident at the beginning that we would actually smash targets."

Interviewer

How was the project's progress monitored?

Participant 3

"I was reporting the head [redacted] and then there were the team meetings and monthly project board meetings and she was reporting to the programme board and all the faculty and the rest of

it.” Along with that we had to report to our lead partner [redacted] and the other partners as well as the Programme Management Unit.

Known or unknown issues encountered?

Interviewer

What known or unforeseen issues were encountered in implementation?

Participant 3

There was a long delay at the start in signing contracts with the partners, so we were not allowed to deliver for a year. This affected our delivery profile and had to keep the teamed buoyed up.

Withdrawal of the lead partner and the change in management and reporting required. I

Interviewer

What was the biggest challenge the project faced?

High level of demands for information from the Programme Management Unit with rubbish deadlines.

Working with the consortium initially, but eventually worked really well.

Participant 3

Interviewer

Was there a point where the early closure of the project was considered?

Participant 3

No

Interviewer

Did the project meet its targets? What changes were made to the targets over the course of the project?

Participant 3

Met targets in the end.

We did reprofile.

There was pressure when we weren't meeting targets.

How well have institutions absorbed lessons learned from projects?

Interviewer

How were lessons learned captured during the project and at the end? Have these informed the institution's future practice?

Participant 3

The closure report was started very early on, and we used to have getting the team together and brainstorming, and every session we would use the plus delta, and the changes we made to how we delivered were actually quite noticeable and we developed some strong products.

Consortium meetings: shared best practice/experience all the way through.

Wrote paper based on experience.

Very hard work to fit into university processes- expectations of work-based learners.

Some changes were made in response towards the end of the project. "This model which has been running for centuries is how we are going to do it."

Projects in HE: trying to get the institution to do stuff, and do it quickly. Much much better now: willing to be more flexible. A better understanding of project needs from the institution.

Change in culture.

(other partners: project teams split up and moved on so left little impact)

How have individual practitioners been affected by their experience of working on projects?

Interviewer

What impact has the experience had on your professional practice?

Participant 3

I came to the university having worked in my specialty full time, then I went into Elevate as the lead and suddenly I was in management, and I suppose I towards the end of Elevate, and even though I

stayed on a big part of me is saying: really? Management? is that really for you? It has been quite challenging, I've loved working with the people, that's a real pleasure, but I've come to the conclusion that management isn't for me. I don't like the person I am as a manager, I'm much bossier as a manager, I don't think it's good for me. I'm much nicer as a mentor. I enjoyed working [the project] it was a small team, it was manageable, and I felt that we were really making a difference. The whole ethos was so strong and you could get really passionate about it. That's why I loved recruiting for [a later project], recruiting all these people who really cared, really cared. It's not for me now. I think that I'm a good leader, I don't think I'm a good manager. I don't like detail, it just bores me. You really need an eye for detail, but equally I believe in trusting people.

I think the learning – [the project] was a big achievement, because it was outside my comfort zone, there were a lot of aspects of management I didn't like, and it took me away from the teaching I was doing, and I sort of floated into the next project when really I should have thought about it and thought oh no, why not be a lecturer again. I've learned so much, so so much, not just about work based learning, but also about writing modules, engaging with businesses, finding out what works for them, finding out you can't force-fit your clients

And I've learned a lot about politics in these type of institutions, and how I don't really like that sort of thing. I'd much rather people would be up front and say what's what. I cope with it - just bang me over the head with it, and just tell me. That's been quite an eye-opener. I enjoyed working with like-minded people within the institution and within the consortium and actually seeing these people whose main driving force was the learner and how can we help them. That spoke directly to me as someone who left school with buggers all, [...] engaging with work based learning in my thirties, and then really changing my life through it, and to be able to help other people, and to meet with colleagues who all feel the same, it was fantastic experience, actually, a lot of challenges, but a really fantastic experience. I've learned so much but I've concluded, at least at this time in my life, it's time for me to get back to mentoring.

Interviewer

In terms of your role what was most challenging personally?

Participant 3

I did have some challenging staff situations, but I didn't that, that was ok. It was hard - I'd have to think about how to do things, but that was ok. What kept me awake at night was the more formal environments where there were maybe politics playing -- I'm not very careful, this is why I'm not very good as a manager, I don't cover my arse. I trust people, I just pile in, if I screw up I just say I screwed up, because to me there's nothing wrong with making mistakes that's how I learn and I think that should apply to everybody. But I was very easy then to shoot down. So when that happened, that would really bring me down. It didn't happen a lot, fortunately, but there were a couple of occasions – I mean, absolutely right, I can't knock it, I didn't tick the boxes, cross the ts or whatever, and I would say 'I messed up', but they were really vicious, unnecessarily so, and I always had the idea that academia is all lovely isn't it – Jesus Christ academics can be vicious. So I'm a bit naïve, actually, I'm very naïve, on a certain level I'm too naïve, people can take advantage of me, show me up to make themselves look clever, and I'm not very good at that sort of thing, so I'd be in a corner with nowhere to go. So if I knew I was going in the next day and I was going to get a kicking

you don't really look forward to that. Now, I've gone through hell this year, I've had a lot of nonsense in different situations, I'm handling myself much better, more confidently, , now I know I'm leaving, because I sort of don't care, and before I did care. That's how I should have been. I'm too naïve, not detailed enough, not strategic enough – all I'm interested in I want my learners, and I want my team, to be happy. I don't think I'm strategic enough to be at this level: I'm in the wrong level. That has kept me up, until recently, when I've let go emotionally..

Interviewer

What about dealing with personnel issues?

Participant 3

I found it impossible. As soon as you've said the word process or policy I've stopped listening to you. It's too boring. [] I had a member of staff who wouldn't do what I wanted her to do. And there wasn't a lot I could do. There hasn't been of support. With this individual, I kind of gave up, and said what do you to do? I sort of gave up. Sometimes you just have to say you've got to do it. That could be quite challenging. It didn't keep me up at night, and I just decided, ok, how can I make use of her?

If you have an issue with a member of staff, I'm not experienced enough, and it's not in my nature, to then get heavy with them. I've done it many times when I've said I know you're not happy, just do it. They'll do it.

I hadn't had any training, I did a management module as part of my masters, I wrote an essay, who cares?

Interviewer

Times you had to conceal what you were feeling?

Participant 3

I'm not good at hiding my feelings. I can't. If I'm pissed off with someone they will usually know it, if I don't like someone, they'll know it. I could show a bit of self-control and hide that but I don't choose to [..] In management situations I've always tried to be emotionally intelligent, and I'm able to step back, and if there are any negative emotions, so I can step back and have a Burns adult-to-adult conversation going on and I've always been good at that. But, and this is why I'm not comfortable as a manager, I've wanted to be one of the gang. And I struggle there.

Interviewer

Was it in a strategic context you had to conceal? Or when wearing the manager hat?

Participant 3

I always tried to use mentoring skills in management conversations and the only way you're going to do that is through emotional intelligence and stepping back from your own emotions to have that conversation. That can be difficult if you have a difficult relationship, but it helps because otherwise your emotions are just going to cloud how you should respond, so yes, it was a conscious, and I do it now in management conversations because you have to deal with people who perhaps you don't get on with, or they've annoyed you, and you have to step back: I can do that, and have the conversation, and then maybe go back and have some gin or whatever, but yes you have to do that. When you let your emotions get into it, it just [...] I'm quite surprised I'm still here, actually, and not off sick with stress and all sorts, so I'm quite impressed with my resilience [...] Certainly [on the project] there were some challenging relationships that, yes I had to step back, because in order to get what I needed for the project, you have to do that.

Interviewer

Are your emotions irrelevant?

Participant 3

They are. What does the project need? What do my staff need? What do the learners need? What do I need for this, and how am I going to get it? I've got to deal with this person I can't stand or who makes me angry or whatever, or they're being horrid to me or whatnot, and you've just to, in order to manage their emotions, you've got to step back from your own emotions and then have the conversation with them so that you will get what you want. I wouldn't say I'm brilliant at that sort of stuff. I think [line manager] was very good at that sort of stuff, and other people aren't. I don't think I'm brilliant and it's more of - it's less a managing skill and more a mentoring skill that's helped me to do it, my knowledge if you like.