

---

# ASSESSMENT FOR THE CHANGING NATURE OF WORK: WORKPLACE LEARNING FACILITATORS

---

Helen Bound  
Annie Karmel  
Arthur Chia

July 2016

## **Publisher's note**

The views and analysis presented in this document are those of the authors as researchers. The contents are intended for discussion and generating ideas, and are not necessarily the views or policy prescriptions of the Institute for Adult Learning or the Government of Singapore.

This publication should be attributed to Institute for Adult Learning (2017). *Assessment for the changing nature of work: Workplace learning facilitators*.

Helen Bound, Annie Karmel and Arthur Chia.

Published by the Institute for Adult Learning, Singapore  
Research and Innovation Division

This publication remains the copyright of the Institute for Adult Learning (IAL), Singapore and may not be reproduced without the permission of the Director of Research and Innovation, IAL. For further information on this publication, please email to [research@ial.edu.sg](mailto:research@ial.edu.sg).

## **CWL**

**Centre for Work and Learning (CWL) is a research centre of the Institute for Adult Learning. CWL specialises in research on continuing education and training system design and practices. Our research employs a range of methodologies designed to deepen understanding of the challenges and opportunities for learning and development in and across different settings, particularly in relation to work and work environments.**

For more information, see <http://www.ial.edu.sg/>

CWL-2017-01

### **Address**

1 Kay Siang Road  
Tower Block Level 6  
Singapore 248922  
[research@ial.edu.sg](mailto:research@ial.edu.sg)

Copyright © 2017 Institute for Adult Learning

# Contents

Preamble	5
1. Introduction	7
2. Assessment for and of Assessment and Alignment	11
3. Dilemmas and Tensions	22
4. Possibilities	25

# Figures and Tables

TABLE 1: EXAMPLE OF COMPETENCIES.....	8
FIGURE 1: ILLUSTRATION OF PROGRAMME'S DESIGN .....	9
TABLE 2: CONCERNS AND POSSIBILITIES FOR ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING AND SUSTAINABLE ASSESSMENT.....	16

# Preamble

This is **ONE** of the six cases on assessment practices and the changing nature of work, undertaken by the Centre for Work and Learning (CWL). Each of the six cases highlights different aspects of innovative approaches to assessment, their possibilities and the challenges involved in assessment for, through and at work. Each case suggests different strategies, tasks and/or practices in assessment that can enable **meaningful** and **engaged learning**.

We think of assessment not as the “test” of what has been learnt at the end of a learning programme, course or set of experiences, but as **judging performance**. We go back to the original meaning of assessment which is “to sit beside”. This means that we can think of assessment as working *with* our learners to guide them to meet the required performance. If we understand assessment like this, then learners also need to understand, to know what that desired performance is. That is, we do not hide from them the criteria or expected performance standards. So in other words we are talking about formative assessment – assessment *for* learning. We also acknowledge that assessment of learning – summative assessment – is necessary for accreditation and certification. The question is how we weave these two forms of assessment together. Examples are provided in some of our six case studies. We discuss this in detail in our full report:

The full report, “Assessment for the changing nature of work”, is available at <url>, as are copies of the five other case studies.

In addition to summative and formative assessment we introduce another kind of assessment – sustainable assessment. Sustainable assessment equips learners not just for meeting, but preparing them for what might be required in the future, beyond the course and/or training / learning experiences. It includes “the capacity to evaluate evidence, appraise situations and circumstances astutely, to draw sound conclusions and act in accordance with this analysis” (Boud & Soler, 2016, 402).

These three types of assessment and the fact that we investigated assessment in the light of the changing nature of work, mean we also need to think of learning and assessment differently. When we think of assessment as a test of the learning, then we are separating assessment from learning. What we are saying is that **learning and assessment are** their own phenomena but they are very much **entwined together**. Figure one metaphorically illustrates this entwinement.

In each case, we describe what the course/programme/training is about and examine assessment in relation to curriculum design, implementation and the ways in which understanding, accomplishment and performance are achieved. We hope these cases provide a glimpse into the different ways assessment has been carried out in design, planning and implementation for the reader. We hope that they highlight possibilities that contribute to new ways of thinking, designing and implementing assessment of, for and as learning. Different conditions and situations (context) will offer different kinds of opportunities for meaningful assessment.

Figure 1: Learning and assessment are entwined



Source:

[http://www.123rf.com/photo\\_3706214\\_stock-photo.html](http://www.123rf.com/photo_3706214_stock-photo.html)

The six case studies are:

- Workplace learning facilitators
- Firefighting: Rota commander course
- Menu change in the food and beverage sector
- Resident doctors
- Aircraft engineering programme
- IT network engineers

# 1. Introduction

The Learning@Work Boot Camp is an ambitious certification programme designed to develop a new role for practitioners in the Continuing Education and Training sector (CET), the Workplace Learning Specialists (WLSes). Programme designers have deliberately taken a stance on assessment *for* learning, boldly declaring in their documentation that assessment is for “developmental purposes”. It is this stance on assessment that draws the researchers’ attention to the programme. Assessment *of* learning (summative assessment) in this programme is almost entirely based on a report of the work done, together with a learning journal prepared by the WLS and a one-on-one oral interview conducted by appointed certification assessors. The assessment *for* learning is largely provided by coaches supporting the WLS as they work with an enterprise to identify a performance issue, design a workplace learning intervention and then implement and evaluate that intervention. However there are also other opportunities of assessment *for* learning in the programme that designers intend to make better use of in the next iteration. This analysis of the programme offers a number of rich learning points in designing and implementing assessment for learning and in developing and supporting new roles. As such for this report, we focus on:

- The formulation of learning outcomes and competencies against which participants are assessed
- The use of the multiple feedback loops designed into the programme (a key feature of formative assessment)
- The potential for sustainable assessment (see explanation of sustainable assessment p.7)
- The importance of constructive alignment (see explanation p.13) in assessment design and implementation

The above points will be discussed in different sections of the report. We commence with a description of the course and its assessment design.

## 1.1 The course

The programme was developed in the context of a policy shift towards greater attention being given to workplace learning. The premise is that workplace learning can be a solution for meeting organisational learning needs without sending people for training, thus minimising disruption to business. The programme takes place over a nine month period and is designed around a workplace learning model, with an estimation of 192 hours of workplace learning and 45 hours of facilitated or “community” learning. The workplace learning portion involves learners who are paired up and connected with an enterprise (which has agreed to participate in the programme) to identify and develop a workplace learning solution to meet their business needs. This “real work immersion” is promoted with the tag line of the programme: “learning is the work and work is the learning”. On completion of the programme, participants are certified by the provider as Workplace Learning Specialists. Therefore, as with all accredited programmes, and in line with the purpose of assessment in the curriculum documentation, this requires assessment to do ‘double duty’ (Boud, 2000); assessment for accreditation purposes (*of* learning), and assessment *for* learning.

## 1.2 Intent and outcomes of the programme

The goals of the programme are to certify workplace learning specialists who can

"Optimise learning and performance gain from daily work activities and the work environment based on needs and constraints of individuals and the organisation (Curriculum document excerpt)."

Graduate outcomes state that,

"Individuals undergoing the certification programmes will be able to demonstrate an appropriate level of ability in diagnosing, co-creating, implementing and evaluating a workplace learning intervention. In addition, they will also exemplify certain qualities and attributes expected of a successful workplace learning facilitator such as openness and curiosity, adaptability and managing change. (Curriculum document excerpt)."

These graduate outcomes are expressed as competencies with each competence having a number of behaviours listed against them, as illustrated in the single example given in Table 1.

**TABLE 1: EXAMPLE OF COMPETENCIES**

Competency Domain	Descriptor	Behaviours
<b>Evaluate</b>	Evaluate the impact of the workplace learning intervention and make recommendations on sustainability and feasibility	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Evaluate learning outcomes and returns of investment to demonstrate value-add</li> <li>2. Recommend potential next steps to enterprise management to sustain positive outcomes of adopting workplace learning</li> <li>3. Use reflective practice to review individual professional growth and development throughout the process</li> </ol>

There is a mixed use of language including graduate outcomes, competency domain, behaviours, along with the intent of “*optimise learning and performance gain*” and the statement, “the assessment would primarily be **for learning** and less of learning... As a result, the assessment process is designed for “**becoming practitioner**” which is about enabling further development rather a summative assessment of accomplishment.” (Extract from curriculum document) This mixed use of language is illustrative of the dilemmas of moving from a competency approach towards a more holistic approach and a focus on assessment *for* learning. This will be explored further under the heading, Dilemmas and tensions.

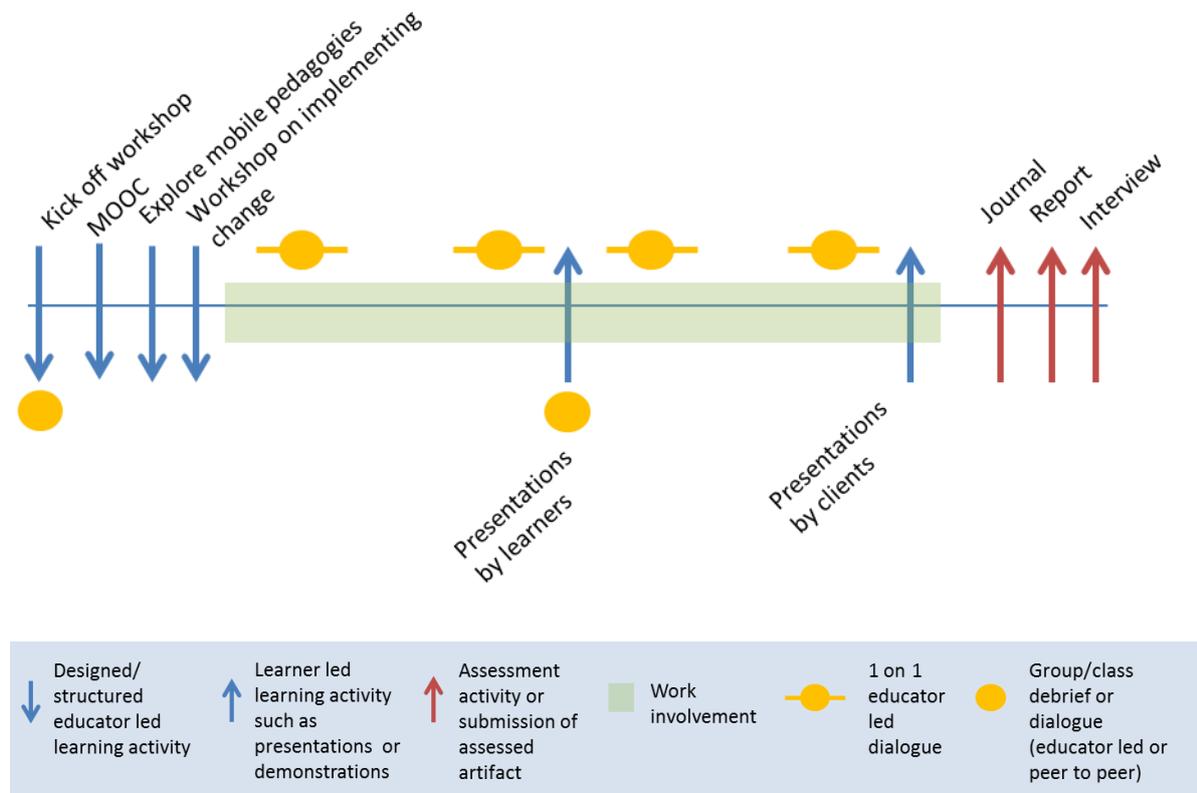
### 1.3 The structure of the programme

The touch points designed to support the work immersion start with an initial round of classroom, online and community practice learning (38 hours) (see the first four blue arrows in Figure 1). The focus of these learning experiences is to introduce learners how to think about learning in the context of work, with a focus on learning, the culture and structure of the workplace, the barriers and affordances for learning and the multitude of possible strategies for learning in work environments. This is followed by two days' focusing on business process improvement, human resource management and organisation development levers. These two

different theoretical perspectives and the issues of alignment result in a number of dilemmas, which will be discussed in detail in later sections of this case.

The middle blue arrow represents a day for learners to give a presentation on their progress after a few months (7 hours). The face-to-face workshops and presentations involve dialogue between the learners and facilitators (depicted by the yellow circles below the line). The purpose of these touch points is that the learners can gain an understanding of what intentional workplace learning can look like, as well as some potential tools that they may develop with their clients. Learners are also expected to keep a reflective journal, complete a report on their client engagement (which involves sign off from the client), and finally participate in an assessment interview (the three red arrows at the end). The reflective journal and the report are meant to be worked on throughout the programme, and then submitted at the end before attending the assessment interview. Throughout the programme, each pair of workplace learning facilitators is also assigned a coach to help them along the way. It is up to the learners and coach to decide how often they meet and what they talk about. They are meant to meet at least three times. And the first meeting should involve the learners developing their own learning goals that they note down in their journal (meetings are depicted by the yellow circles above the line).

**FIGURE 1: ILLUSTRATION OF PROGRAMME'S DESIGN**



#### 1.4 The summative assessment

The six assessment components that need to be met for the certification requirements are: attaining competency on the online learning course; supporting the administration of a provided diagnostic tool through conducting interviews within their client organisation; attending 70% of the facilitated professional development activities; completing the report that documents the workplace learning solution development and implementation (which includes inputs from the clients, client assigned project lead and coach to ascertain the quality of each workplace learning facilitator's contribution); completing a learning journal that illustrates reflection on the learning milestones; and demonstrating credible progress and accomplishment in the desired competencies and qualities in a final certification interview.

Three assessors undertake the summative assessment, all of whom were involved in the design of the programme. From the beginning of the programme, the assessors know who they will be assessing, and may (but do not have to) attend meetings between the learner and the client or chat with the learner and their coach to gain a sense of the learners' progress. This sense is then drawn upon during the final assessment interview as they pose questions and seek illustrations of competence from the learner. These assessors also provide guidance to the coaches about their coaching techniques.

## 2. Assessment for and of Assessment and Alignment

There are rich sources of assessment for learning, reflective of the intent of the course designers to focus on assessment for development. The structure of the course and the work that learners do

(working with an enterprise to identify a learning issue, design a learning intervention and implement and evaluate it) offer multiple potential feedback opportunities (see Figure 1), a key feature of assessment *for* learning.

Feedback is a key feature of assessment for learning. Shifting from a focus that privileges assessment *of* learning (summative assessment) to

### Feedback

The focus in more recent work on feedback is on “the contribution of others to learning through assessment, and repositioning the notion of feedback not as an act of information giving to students, but as a co-productive process in which both students and others have key roles to play.” (Boud & Soler, 2016, p.403)

### Assessment for learning

Assessment *for* learning focuses on participants learning, helping them to know how to improve (Gardner, 2012). Participants need continuous information from a variety of sources about their learning; information that informs what they are succeeding at, and where they should put their efforts to improve and strategies for moving forward (Berry, 2008).

Assessment for learning does not necessarily include grading, assigning marks or noting the learner as competent or not yet competent.

The focus in more recent work on feedback is on “the contribution of others to learning through assessment, and repositioning the notion of **feedback not as an act of information giving to students, but as a co-productive process** in which both students and others have key roles to play” (Boud & Soler, 2016, p.403).

assessment *for* learning requires careful planning and creation of opportunities for feedback; this planning is evident in the design of this course. When assessment for learning is designed well, learners are provided with many opportunities to understand how they are progressing, have clarity about what they are progressing towards in terms of expected standards, where they need to improve and how they might improve. It takes time and exposure to various experiences and examples for learners to understand the quality of expected performance. Discussion about how to interpret these experiences and examples in relation to the desired performance, including feedback from multiple sources (e.g. educator, peers, clients, supervisors, coaches, critical friend, etc.) contributes to understanding of the desired performance.

Developing practices that support assessment *for* learning requires moving beyond traditional teaching and learning practices and a shared understanding between designers, facilitators and

assessors. In addition, the first time such a programme is conducted will inevitably unearth inconsistencies and room for improvement as is the case here. At a structural level of the programme, opportunities to give and receive feedback from self, peers and facilitators are present in the face-to-face workshops and presentation day. But as discussed below, there are challenges in implementation. A strong point of the programme is the potential for coaches to engage in dialogue with the learners on their progress and challenges. Our data did not capture this aspect in detail, but coaches with strong theoretical understanding of the work the learners are engaged in, and equipped with a dialogical approach to coaching would be able to set up learning conversations that enable learners to increasingly deepen their ability to reflect on their own progress. Coaches are also in a position to give targeted feedback as required, thus providing some scaffolding for the learners as they make sense of doing the work.

## 2.1 Assessment for learning in the course

The design of the programme has rich potential for assessment *for* learning. Yet, the following quote indicates that this learner and possibly others did not consider that the programme offered assessment *for* learning.

*So actually during the implementation process, there are not many things that we can actually use to see whether we have reached the competency and all these things. So I think it's only at the end of the project when we have completed everything therefore the evaluation data results and reports and everything. Then we can have more information.” (Learner)*

This observation indicates that from her perspective, useful feedback is only available at the end of the project, not so much during the project. This suggests three possibilities:

1. That learners are not used to seeing opportunities for feedback during the process of learning, such as those provided through the coaches. That is, this learner did not label discussions with their coaches as feedback and as a way of seeing their achievements towards reaching the competency.
2. That the competences capture the end product, but not the process of becoming a WLS, although curriculum documentation indicated that “*the assessment process is designed for “becoming [a] practitioner”*”. The idea of ‘becoming’ requires consistent feedback when it is designed into the programme.
3. That the intent of using “*assessment for development*” has to be explicitly designed into the learning experiences.

The following section explores the potential of assessment for learning and sustainable assessment.

To do this we describe our observation of participants’ presentations half way through the programme (see Figure 1) where we observed a number of issues, questions and uncertainties, raised by participants. These ponderings and uncertainties were related to specific aspects of the summative assessment. Namely the following ‘behaviours’ listed in the curriculum documentation:

- Advocates a multi-disciplinary approach that takes into account organisation development and job design issues to create the conditions for success
- Anticipates potential implementation challenges and devises mitigating strategies to facilitate smooth implementation (from curriculum documentation)

In discussing these concerns and possibilities for how they could be addressed (see Table 2), we illustrate just how intertwined learning and formative assessment are. In addition we share some thoughts on strategies for sustainable assessment (see box for explanation of

### **Sustainable assessment**

Sustainable assessment equips learners not just for meeting but preparing them for what might be required in the future, after graduation. Sustainable assessment includes ‘the capacity to evaluate evidence, appraise situations and circumstances astutely, to draw sound conclusions and act in accordance with this analysis’ (Boud & Soler, 2016, p.19). The qualities of judgement that need to be developed are similar for students and for teachers; it is only the subsequent ends to which these judgements are put that differ. Key elements of developing informed judgement from the perspective of the students include: (1) identifying oneself as an active learner; (2) identifying one’s own level of knowledge and the gaps in this; (3) practising testing and judging; (4) developing these skills over time; and (5) embodying reflexivity and commitment. Sustainable assessment demands that learners make conscious comparisons between self-assessments and assessments by teachers, peers and other stakeholders, and that responsibility for the assessment process must gradually shift from the teacher to the students, because, after graduation, people themselves need to drive their own learning. (Boud & Soler, 2016)

sustainable assessment). It is worth reminding the reader at this point that feedback is at the core of assessment for learning; it is a “co-productive process” (Boud & Soler, 2016, p. 403). This means feedback is not just something that is given to the learner by a facilitator, coach or more experienced other. Rather, feedback requires interaction and dialogue between the learner and self, between the learner and peers and between the learner and more experienced other stakeholders (facilitator, supervisor, coach etc.); sometimes all at once or any one of these at different points in time. Following the description in the following section, we include a table that sets out the issues, what happened, possibilities for assessment for learning and for sustainable assessment. Table 2 sets out participants’ concerns listed above, what happened, possibilities for assessment for learning and sustainable assessment.

## **2.2 Opportunities for assessment for learning and sustainable assessment**

We commence this section with a description of our observations of the presentations learners made about half way through the programme (see Figure 1).

The day was facilitated by an external consultant with HRD expertise (this focus turned out to be important – explained in detail below); feedback came in the form of questions from peers that raised multiple and complex issues. For example, one learner (let’s call her Hwee Li) working with a service organisation suggested that buddies be taught how to effectively shadow and to establish a community of practice (CoP) for property officers. The property officers were the group she was designing the learning intervention for. They are front line officers and often receive abuse from the public they interface with. Questions her peers posed included:

- You said property officers are time starved, so how reconcile time for attending CoP? Wouldn't they see it as more work?
- Suggestion from a peer was made for an IT system to help feedback where every case is logged into the system. He suggested this would mean officers can get reports for trend analysis, time frames etc.
- What is the performance issue you are trying to address?
- A suggestion was made by another peer about need for officers to handle self-emotions (given the constant abuse they face)

At this point the facilitator gave recognition to the value of the shadowing and the interviewing Hwee Li had done, noting that she had observed a lot of things. He observed that the issue was one of work design, and thus need to solve this before addressing learning issues. It seemed that the facilitator perceived that Hwee Li was being criticised by her peers and required support and recognition.

Another learner asked, "Are we saying use what is already within the organisation before bringing in a new solution?" (the creativity and innovativeness of the learning intervention are assessed)

Yet another learner commented that the learning solution proposed by Hwee Li is such long term. Can the assessors (of the WLS programme) accept non-learning solution?

The facilitator of the session then asked, "What is learning? It is about individual internalising. So design of learning is how to get people to internalise."

- Two WLSes then discuss individual and organisational focus
- Another WLS then questions the facilitator's definition of learning in relation to performance. This was followed by a question from others about the relationship between a learning tool and a performance tool.
- The facilitator repeats his point, saying, "Remember to close the loop – is it a learning solution?"
- Another learner questions the need for internalisation

This exchange is illustrative of a number of similar exchanges that took place over the day.

The concerns raised by participants in the observations of the presentations can be summarised as:

- What is a learning intervention and what is not?
- What is learning? Is it something that happens solely inside the head of the individual or is it more than this?
- How does addressing individual learning needs meet organisational needs?
- What do we mean by performance and how does it relate to learning?

### Meta-thinking

Meta-thinking enables a 'helicopter view of what is being learned in relation to the participant's own experience and their context. The process of meta-thinking is enabled through processes of inquiry, dialogue and reflection. It is mediated through various tools, personal motivation and opportunities for doing the work and reflection, plus feedback within participants' own contexts over time. It is fostered within a learning environment where dialogue is intrinsic to participation, enabling the development of a vulnerable community of care. This enables a level of reflection beyond the technical reflection that teachers might normally engage in on a daily basis to improve their teaching.

"Meta" processes include:

- exposure of assumptions and values,
  - recognition and naming of tensions,
  - developing a shared meta-language,
  - making different paradigms, frames or identities visible
- 
- iterative movement between problem, questions, inquiry, methodology and methods;
  - bringing layered thinking;
  - entering into and consciously exploring different identities, perspectives or frames;
  - creating a dialogical space for exploration (keeping complexity and difference alive).

(Stack & Bound, 2012, p.104)

**TABLE 2: CONCERNS AND POSSIBILITIES FOR ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING AND SUSTAINABLE ASSESSMENT**

Learners' concerns	What happened	Possibilities for assessment for learning	Possibilities for sustainable assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is a learning intervention and what is not?</li> </ul>	<p>The need for clarification and discussion was repeated by the facilitator.</p>	<p>For the group to co-construct what a learning intervention is and is not, by using the examples given to that point and classifying them. In the process a way of thinking is developed on how to make this judgement call.</p>	<p>By co-constructing a way of thinking about what is and is not a learning intervention, learners are then able to make the judgement themselves, (an aspect of sustainable assessment) and are able to explain why something is or is not a learning intervention and what the grey areas might be.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. What is learning? Is it something that happens solely inside the head of the individual or is it more than this?</li> </ul>	<p>The facilitator has this understanding of learning that was different from some of the learners. There was no dialogue about this.</p> <p>This is partly because learners tried to make sense of different approaches to learning and the learning intervention they have been introduced to. However it appears there could be a need for dedicated space in the programme understandings how different theoretical approaches (e.g. HRD and workplace learning) may have different ways of understanding learning.</p>	<p>To open up and co-construct ways to understand learning in the context of work and workplaces. To identify and name the different ways of understanding learning and the different theoretical perspectives (e.g. HDD, a cognitive perspective, learning through social interaction, learning that builds on affordances and addresses constraints within the workplace)</p>	<p>This can contribute to the development of a way of thinking about learning; it is meta-thinking, not just naming the different perspectives, but understanding why different theoretical understandings of learning will privilege particular approaches. As such it enables learners to make judgements about their own assumptions, about assumptions within the workplaces and about why particular stakeholders may favour different approaches.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. How does addressing individual learning needs meet organisational needs?</li> </ul>	<p>This was not addressed during the day (it may have been addressed in earlier workshops)</p> <p>Facilitator summary at the end of the day noted the following in a PPT slide:</p> <p>What are the performance issues?  How did the issue affect process and efficiency?  What is the impact on business?  Need to have buy-in from HR  Stakeholder analysis sheet important  Most have already identified a lot of “non-training problems”</p>	<p>Relates to the issue about performance and what we mean by performance. Developing / co-constructing a shared agreement for the purposes of the work, would provide learners with the opportunity to address this question themselves, once they have seen it worked through. This concern is also connected to different understandings of learning, as in concern 2. In addition, the facilitator could further enhance meta-thinking by providing possible conceptual frames for thinking about the relationship between individual and organisational learning needs. For example, the latter is often labelled as ‘performance’ or ‘lack of’ or a ‘gap’ in the individual’s knowledge and skill. But this kind of labelling can get in the way of analysing what is really happening; is the culture of the team or organisation not supportive for example. Such problems go back to concern 1, what is and is not a learning issue?</p>	<p>As above</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What do we mean by performance and how does it relate to learning?</li> </ul>	<p>Facilitator responded with, “Remember to close the loop – is it a learning issue?” solution?</p>	<p>As above</p>	<p>As above</p>

The work the learners are doing is authentic, offering great opportunity for integration of ideas, approaches, strategies, making judgements (see Boud & Soler, 2016) about the most appropriate way forward in the setting they are working with. These are all aspects of **sustainable assessment**.

The challenge in making the most of the opportunities offered in a programme where learners do the work as they learn is both a design and facilitation challenge. The purpose of the day was to share presentations and provide feedback. However the time required for hearing the presentations allowed for limited discussion and co-construction of feedback. The design challenge is one of balancing limited face-to-face time with the rich sources of learning presented through the sharing of experiences and thinking of peers. Inevitably participants would be comparing their approach with what they heard from their peers. What we do not know is what the basis of such comparisons was, except in instances where we analyse the questions and feedback given to individual presenters. Sharing offers a vast array of different kinds of context in which designers need to identify issues and design learning interventions. Such rich sources of learning are traditionally dealt with through a sharing process; however this pedagogical strategy takes a great deal of time. Alternatives include providing IT platforms for sharing, facilitators and coaches knowing the learner's progress and issues before the face-to-face sharing session, and facilitators and designers developing a shared understanding of the theoretical and practical issues of the learners' experience. This frees up time to address the concerns raised through using strategies that support assessment *for learning* and sustainable assessment as suggested in Table 2.

Learners' past educational experiences lead them to expect feedback from the teacher, as expressed in a learner's comment almost under her breath of, "No comments, huh." To take up opportunities not just for assessment *for learning* but also sustainable assessment, requires deliberate designing into the curriculum of scaffolding for learners in making judgements through co-producing (Boud & Soler, 2016) frameworks and standards against which judgements can be made. Table 2 provides some suggestions for how this might be done. This approach is further expanded on under section 2.3.

### 2.3 Assessment of learning

Of the three major summative assessment tasks and assessment *of learning*, (the report, the learning journal and the one-to-one interview) the report was the most valued.

Learners valued the report as it not only captured the process, requiring enterprise sign-off at each stage (as a means of endorsement from the enterprise before proceeding to the next stage), but also the process of completing the various sections "*makes us reflect on what we are doing*", and to, "*crystalise your ideas, clarify what you're, gives you proper procedures I'd say on how to approach the client*" (Harriet, learner). This comment suggests that Harriet is using this learning to judge her progress – an aspect of sustainable assessment.

*Enterprise report is really, really comprehensive and it captures so much information... Really, really taking a lot of time, so if you can actually fill in all these sections in different part of the report then those are the actual evidences and while we are filling out the enterprise report, the report actually forces us to go through the structured learning process. Make us think, makes us reflect on what we are doing so this is in a way is good for us but then it's quite a lot of work to do it but then it's something that*

*will make us keep on track and make us reflect on what we are doing and see how we are doing and things like that. (Harriet, learner)*

Strong scaffolding was provided to assist learners focus on what the report was expected to look like with an example being given. The report is important in making visible what the learners have achieved; it is a powerful source of feedback (both formal and informal) at each of the stages of completion. The report was used by coaches to give feedback to WLF at every stage. This is a strong feature of assessment for learning designed into the programme.

The learning journal however was perceived by learners as having limited value with many completing it just before it was due to be handed in. When learning journals are used as an artefact for summative assessment, they are often perceived by learners in this way. Clever design of the use of this potentially valuable source is to design an assessment activity that strongly relates to the learning outcomes of the programme where learners are required to use the evidence they capture in a journal to undertake the assessment task. The journal becomes a source of evidence that the learners use to contribute to the completion of an assessment task, not as an assessment artefact in and of itself.

## **2.4 Constructive alignment**

Alignment or “constructive alignment” (Biggs, 2003) tells us that the curriculum, its outcomes, the learning activities (teaching methods) and assessment activities all need be aligned to each other. There needs to be consistency in each of the different aspects of the curriculum, including in the enacted curriculum (curriculum as it is taught). Thus, when considering assessment, curriculum designers and facilitators need to ensure all forms of assessment, formative (assessment for learning), summative (assessment of learning) and sustainable (inclusive of assessment as learning), align with the learning outcomes/competencies and the learning activities.

The following quote indicates that learners value this alignment and note if they perceive it is not there.

*They did give us some training but at this point in time I don't really see the link between that training and what we're striving for. (Harriet, learner)*

It should be noted that this comment was made part way through the programme and Harriet may think differently by the end of the programme. Periods of confusion or not understanding the linkages between aspects of a programme and/or concepts is to be expected. The issue for feedback is to understand the nature of this confusion. This first run of this programme is a means for beginning to gather typical areas of concern and confusion for learners in order to find ways of addressing them within the programme. See the IT Network Engineers Case for an example of how this was done.

Curriculum documentation for this programme states that assessment is for “*development*” and for “*becoming [a] practitioner*” (curriculum document).

This is indicative of design that has the future and the learner clearly in mind; it is something to strive for in good curriculum design. The problem is that the focus on competences to be assessed is about the ‘doing’ - diagnosing, co-creating, implementing and evaluating a workplace learning intervention - and not so much about the “becoming practitioner”, or indeed about development as it relates to “becoming”. This indicates some misalignment between the intent of the programme and the design of learning and assessment, as indicated in Harriet’s quote.

Understanding the struggles of becoming a WLF provides a strong source of material to use in designing curriculum and ensuring alignment between the intent of assessment for development and for ‘becoming’. Our report on the programme for IT Network

Engineers is an example, where the curriculum designers’ knowledge of the sector and its issues enabled them to design a decision tree to assist the engineers in identifying network problems. The decision tree, (a kind of heuristic) enabled the engineers to develop a way of thinking that is intrinsic to their work. Similarly in this case there is opportunity to develop ways of thinking like a WLF through addressing the struggles and issues that they face in doing the work of a WLF and in learning to become one.

An important aspect of such struggles and issues is captured in the discussion in section 2.1. As part of clever design curriculum, designers in this programme introduced learners to different perspectives and understandings of learning through using very different ways of understanding work and learning. Specifically learners were introduced to HRD practices and social constructivist and to some extent socio-cultural understandings of learning not so much through theoretical understandings but through the practices that are pertinent to these different perspectives. This is important as WLFs will encounter this in their day-to-day experiences as they undertake the work of a WLF. So thinking like a WLF requires the WLFs to be able to identify the different perspectives in enterprise documentation, and in how different stakeholders in the organisation describe their issues and agendas. Not only do WLFs need to be able to recognise the different perspectives and theoretical constructs behind these perspectives, they need to be aware of their own assumptions, beliefs and theoretical perspectives. The ability to take a ‘helicopter view’ of what they are seeing and hearing and consciously relate it to their own beliefs also provides them with strong frameworks to make sound judgements of what worked, and why at a deep level.

### **Constructive Alignment**

“‘Constructive alignment’ starts with the notion that the learner constructs his or her own learning through relevant learning activities. The teacher’s job is to create a learning environment that supports the learning activities appropriate to achieving the desired learning outcomes. The key is that all components in the teaching system - the curriculum and its intended outcomes, the teaching methods used, the assessment tasks - are aligned to each other. All are tuned to learning activities addressed in the desired learning outcomes. The learner finds it difficult to escape without learning appropriately” (Biggs, 2003).

For example one learner pondered on alternatives to the approach of putting in place standard operating procedures (SOPs); *“other models – what are they? The bureaucratic model, where are the boundaries between need and not need? (Wei Wei, learner)*

Different designers and facilitators in the programme have different understandings and theoretical stances: for example during the presentations made by participants, one of the programme designers posed the question, *“SOPs may not be what they need. What is it they really need?”* (programme designer). The facilitator then asked, *“Is the company getting listed (ISO) as this is an external driver. Needs good management documentation... Need SOPs as this the start of the process of differentiation...”* To see these different perspectives side by side is a potentially strong learning opportunity of assessment for learning and contributing to capabilities for undertaking sustainable assessment. By asking each of the above programme leaders to explain their different perspectives and asking learners to analyse the perspectives in relation to the enterprise issue being discussed at the time contributes to greater clarity about the different perspectives, the language used within them and the implications of the different perspectives. In the process a framework for making such judgements is being developed. For example awareness of the different language of different perspectives, what the ideas are behind that language and the implications of each perspective are three aspects of a potential framework or heuristic of thinking like a WLF and thus to ‘becoming’.

Approaches such as this achieve alignment between the intent of the programme and the learning and assessment processes and tasks. Such approaches also develop capabilities for sustainable assessment where the components of a framework for making judgements about the work are further expanded and applied across a range of cases. All of this is possible within the programme as there is great variety in the enterprises that the learners are working with.

# 3. Dilemmas and Tensions

The dilemmas touched on in the report so far are:

## 1. Alignment

- a) Difference between intent of assessment and the competences actually assessed
- b) Assessment of what WLFs 'do' but an intended focus on 'becoming'

## 2. Making assessment judgements

- a) Consistent interpretation of competences between the three assessors

## 3. Uncertainties experienced by learners about what was expected that could be addressed through building sustainable assessment into the programme.

### 3.1 Alignment

The difference between the intent of assessment and the competences assessed is explored in section 2.1. This section will focus on, assessment of what WLFs 'do' but an intended focus on 'becoming'. The designers have taken a broad perspective of competence in listing the competencies as, identifies the learning problem that is aligned to a business need; co-create workplace learning intervention with key stakeholders; facilitate the piloting of the intervention, monitor progress, and trouble-shoot as required; evaluate the impact of the workplace learning intervention and make recommendations on sustainability and feasibility. This is the focus of the summative assessment. The problem here is that this focus on the 'doing' does not capture the 'becoming' also highlighted in the curriculum documentation. However the 'becoming' is in part captured in an aspect of the graduate profile, "*Continuously reflect on personal and professional capabilities in workplace learning facilitation to identify growth areas for self*" (Curriculum document). Becoming a WLF practitioner is also captured, in part, in the qualities listed in the curriculum documentation: "openness & curiosity, adaptability and flexibility, change management, and professionalism." Considerable care and thought has been taken in putting these aspects together. The question is, is it reasonable and possible to capture competencies or learning outcomes that will be assessed?

If the focus of the course is in developing its graduates to become practitioners who are able to adapt to changing situations and futures, then, yes it is important to capture the essence of what it means to be and constantly "*becoming* a practitioner" as roles change, evolve and make different demands depending on changing settings and circumstances. To do this effectively requires clarity about what it means to be "*becoming*" a WLF, which may be wider than the aspects and qualities already captured in the curriculum documentation as part of the graduate profile and desired qualities.

In addition a focus on 'becoming' lends itself to building in strong elements of sustainable assessment enabling graduates to make informed judgements about the work they are doing.

### 3.2 Making assessment judgements

Making assessment judgements in this programme was demanding for the assessors for a number of reasons. One was that the different assessors had different understandings in their interpretation of competences and another reason relates to the separation of roles in the programme.

Different interpretations of aspects of the competencies such as innovation, creativity caused confusion for some.

*Innovation or creativity or something like this, it can also be very subjective, yeah. Some people may think creating something very different from the existing one is innovative or creative. Some people may think making slight change to the existing one is also creative enough or innovative enough. So this kind of thing can be quite difficult to prove or it also depends on the assessor, the person who is assessing us may think differently.” (Learner)*

This uncertainty highlights a common issue in assessment; namely, learners often do not find the assessment criteria to be transparent. In many courses learners have no part in the development or use of the assessment criteria, so are unfamiliar with what they might actually mean. In applying principles of sustainable assessment, learners are exposed to the criteria and can provide important feedback into how they are interpreting the criteria. This may result in a need to rewrite criteria. One method of developing greater transparency of criteria is to have learners use the criteria to make judgements about a) their own and b) their peers' work. This process can result in learners' developing greater clarity about what is expected.

### 3.3 Sustainable assessment

This innovative programme offers a different experience to what is commonly provided in most training programmes. Learners felt their uncertainty was compounded by confusion about what 'evidence' they had to produce, as illustrated by the following extract from a focus group of learners:

*Learner 1: To me it wasn't very clear as in what kind of evidence are needed because sitting there . . . and also don't know how much detail is expected in that box, in the box. . . . (I was) getting a bit worried I said oh dear I didn't take photographs, oh dear I didn't do video recording.*

*Learner 2: So I think in the end the artefacts came in the form of a lot of documents, maybe emails etcetera which there is some form of evidence...”*

*Learner 1: Yeah so I was like oh dear the emails are all over the place. I've been worried for nine months.*

*Learner 2: I think that yeah it wasn't clear, it wasn't that clear. It wasn't that clear and my understanding of artefacts could be different from yours.*

The programme designers sought to make assessment for development and that assessment judgements were made from a wide range of sources. They also expected learners to take ownership in providing the evidence and to demonstrate progress.

*. . . we throw the ball back in the court of the facilitators [WLFs], we tell them from the beginning that the approach we are taking is that you show us how you have demonstrated those things, so we have certain things in place that you are going to do, the enterprise report, you are going to do the learning journal but those are really just platforms for you to be able to show us how you have demonstrated those areas, so yeah we are not so hung up on you must show me this at this particular juncture . . . so I think we set up in a way that affords enough flexibility and hopefully also gives a bit more ownership that they feel that you know, that it's for them to say why I should be certified. Yeah and then you know, yeah we come in more to support, to validate that." (Qing Yuan, designer and assessor)*

Different kinds of learning experience such as offered in this programme require different learning strategies and expectations on the part of the learners. Taking 'more ownership' such that it is for "them to say why I should be certified" requires making informed judgements. These are capabilities requiring strong meta-cognitive, learning to learn abilities, and the making of conscious comparisons that need to be designed into the course, that is deliberately designing in sustainable assessment would be an important strategy for addressing such uncertainties.

## 4. Possibilities

- a) Develop greater clarity in what it means to be and to become a WLF and capture this in learning outcomes
- b) It may be easier to move to learning outcomes or capabilities as opposed to competencies and behaviours to capture the complexity of the learning to be assessed
- c) Build in sustainable assessment as suggested, where learners increasingly take on responsibility for assessment and they indeed have to justify why they should be certified.
- d) Take up the already existing rich opportunities of assessment *for* learning
- e) Bring assessors together to reach agreement on how to interpret the assessment criteria

# References

Biggs, J. (2003). *Aligning teaching for constructing learning*. The Higher Education Academy. [https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/resources/id477\\_aligning\\_teaching\\_for\\_constructing\\_learning.pdf](https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/resources/id477_aligning_teaching_for_constructing_learning.pdf) Accessed 20th June 2016.

Boud, D. (2000). *Sustainable assessment: rethinking assessment for the learning society*. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 22(2), 151-167

Boud, D. & Soler, R. (2016). *Sustainable assessment revisited*, *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 41(3), 400-413.

Colley, H., James, D., Tedder, M., Diment, K. (2003) "*Learning as becoming in vocational education and training: class, gender and the role of vocational habitus*" in *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 55(4), pp. 471-496.

Stack, S. & Bound, H. (2012). *Exploring new approaches to professional learning: deepening pedagogical understanding of Singapore CET trainers through meta-cognition and practitioner-based research*. Singapore: IAL.