Management Apprenticeships – some early learning

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This is all good news!

The Apprenticeship programmes delivered well require real design skills, and assessment support capabilities that I am finding really energising.

If you believe this can be delivered virtually, online with minimal contact, think again.

At last we have a truly work-based learning programme that tests our skills, and pushes our ability to flexibly support individuals (not members of groups).

I for one say bring it on!

In the beginning…

During the summer I spent a lot of time getting to know the level three Management Apprentice standards, both the Crown documents that are the source of all guidance, and the ILM level three Diploma syllabus, all 130 pages of it, that I am using as the delivery framework.

This is an uncharted, unclear (who really knows what End Point Assessment is going to look like?) process, and I find the structure of a specifically designed Diploma essential. I really would not like to be designing and reinventing wheels first time out with so much at stake if it all falls over.

The first workshop was delivered in August, and I am now about to deliver this for a second group.

I offer these thoughts as guidance from my own personal learning journey, and have highlighted what I feel are the most significant learning points so far.

Motivated learners are the key

The level three is a 370 Guided Learning Hours programme, so there is a need to show under audit that this has been met. This requires a lot of learner-directed activity. Of course this can and must be supported, but believe me it is something of a shock for many to discover that they are genuinely going to have to drive this process for themselves.

It is simply not possible to run this is a contact-heavy way, unless massive time and financial resources are committed. Thus learner selection is critical, and all need to be thoroughly briefed before being signed up. This is not to say learners are left on their own, on the contrary, they need a very significant amount of support time, it's simply that only they for instance can do what it takes to truly keep a CPD record going all the way to End Point Assessment.

From a delivery perspective, this demands a lot in turn from we that facilitate the programme. My normal practice is to encourage a lot of learner interaction, and these programmes will up that rate of contact by many factors. This means being ready to deliver the support it takes, often out of hours, and beyond invoiced parameters because it's what is needed to get those we work with to a successful outcome.

Momentum is essential, contact cycle times, ongoing support, and a continuous feed of material, prompts, and whatever it takes to keep things moving forward is necessary to avoid learners stalling – and all this for a relatively short duration in comparison to higher value levy programmes.

Holistic assessment: Forward to the past!

The good old days of vocational assessment are back, and this means we have a wide range of methods to test the big four evidence criteria: relevancy, sufficiency, currency, and authenticity. If this means nothing to you, than you have probably not assessed many competency based qualifications, and will need to get familiar with using Witness Testimony, Reflection on practice, observation and all the many other ways to assess other than using the dreaded written assignments.

This is a messy qualification, and in a good way. Instead of issuing written assignments, and neatly controlling the process, the more aware learners become of the syllabus, the more in turn I believe they should be encouraged to manage their individual and specific assessment path, reflecting what they are doing naturally in their work place – yes this really can and should be work place driven!

I am finding an e-portfolio platform essential for this, and the City and Guilds 'Learning Assistant' is ideal. Mention of this, and of the above assessment flexibility highlights the need to induct and set up all learners really well so they can get started with confidence.

Whatever process by which the Apprenticeship is delivered, and there are many options, adherence to the source Standard is critical. The ultimate costs of not working to the required Standard are too important to have less than the most robust and capable internal verification practices and a programme designed tightly to the source specification.

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