Management development in Ireland: justifying the investment

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Abstract

Purpose – Drawing upon survey and interview data, this research paper aims to explore the usage and impact of management development processes and practices in Ireland from an organisational perspective.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper examines numerous related issues including: the issue of aligning management development needs to business strategy; the usage of management development methods; the development of high potential managers; and the assignment of responsibility for management development. Tbe paper is the result of a study which included a combination of 13 semi-structured interviews with HR/training managers and the completion of postal questionnaires by 53 respondents from the HR/training management population in Ireland from a cross section of organisations.

Findings – The study suggests that organisations are both concerned for their management population, see their development as a key priority and are willing to invest in them. Organisations are experimenting with the usage of numerous developmental methods and are particularly aware of the benefits achieved from informal methods. Both reactive and *ad-hoc* approaches to management development were observed.

Originality/value – This paper adds value to management learning and education theory and concludes by highlighting the fact that before initiating management development activities, organisations must question their rationale for investing resources in development. Failing to devote time at the initiation stage of a management development activity will result in organisations trying to "reverse engineer" and justify developmental initiatives upon completion. Organisations must become more acutely aware of the indirect benefits that accrue from management development instead of focusing all attention to the visible direct outcomes.

Keywords Management development, Careers, Career development, Mentoring, Coaching, Ireland

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Developmental and learning initiatives for managers are frequently linked with the objectives of national economies, organisations and individuals. Without adequate development of the management population, a modern industrial economy cannot maintain competitiveness, organisations lack flexibility in responding to change and managers cannot adjust to new career patterns (Thomson *et al.*, 2001). Management development initiatives have many "spill-over" effects; specifically, it has been articulated that these effects accrue at national, sectoral and organisational levels:

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- *National*. Management development increases managerial productivity and effectiveness which in turn contributes, or has the potential to contribute to, the economic "wellbeing" of a country, particularly in the context of a rapidly evolving global market (Enterprise Strategy Group, 2004; Heraty and Morley, 2003; Open University, 2000; Lorbiecki, 1993; Handy, 1988).
- *Sectoral*. A report in the *Financial Times* "Fund Management" supplement on 18 November 2002 reported that Golman Sachs had developed a rating system for grading the quality of managers in European companies. This "management quality score" is put alongside a "business quality score" to reach an overall judgement of the company. Cullen (2004) identified differing expectations with regard to management competencies and qualities in the context of recruitment notices for different sectors.
- *Organisational*. Management development is assessed in terms of its ability to enable or contribute to strategy (Longenecker and Ariss, 2002; Meldrum and Atkinson, 1998; Bussard and Cianni, 1994; Osbaldeston and Barham, 1992; Temporal, 1990) or organisation development and culture change (Anderson, 1993; Snell and Davies, 1988; Roskin, 1986; Varney, 1976). Other articles articulate that the benefits of management development, learning or development initiatives provide benefit which develop the individual manager whilst simultaneously supporting organisational and strategic objectives (Jansen *et al.*, 2001; Coopey and Burgoyne, 2000; Burgoyne, 1988).

In a recent *Journal of Management Development* article, Heraty and Morley (2003) point out that the volume of management development undertaken in Ireland increased significantly during the boom years of Ireland's "Celtic Tiger" economy. In their profile of the Irish economy, Heraty and Morley forewarn about issues such as the need to control high rates of inflation and growing costs particularly in the area of labour and related costs. Over the last few years Ireland has experienced an economic downturn, which has led to something of an easing of the labour market tightness but there is still an urgent need to continue to maintain Ireland's cost competitiveness. The empirical work undertaken for the research in this paper was completed in late 2003 when the Irish economy was recovering from the effects of high-growth recorded since the mid-1990s.

In July 2004 the report of the Enterprise Strategy Group, a high level cross-sectoral group charged with strengthening the competitiveness of Ireland's enterprise economy, was published. The report identifies four areas related to conditions "while not conferring competitive advantage, are essential to the success of the strategy – they are basic requirements for international competitiveness" (Enterprise Strategy Group, 2005, p. 91). One of these "essential condition areas" treats the development of "management capability". This paper thus explores the usage and impact of management development processes and practices in Ireland from an organisational perspective. It aims to add to Heraty and Morley's (2003) earlier work by examining issues such as:

- organisational rationales for investing in management development;
- the alignment of management development needs to business strategy;
- the usage of management development methods;
- the development of high potential managers and succession planning;

- the assignment of responsibility for management development; and
- the evaluation and review of management development initiatives

The internal and external factors which both encourage and discourage the usage of management development methods are also discussed. This paper has resulted from a study which comprised a combination of 13 semi-structured interviews with HR training managers and the completion of postal questionnaires by 53 HR training managers from a cross section of organisations in Ireland. The paper adds value to management learning and education theory and concludes by highlighting the fact that management development is viewed as having a positive impact on the performance of individual managers. In addition, the paper also contributes to the debate surrounding the evaluation of management development by pushing forward the idea that organisations need to seriously explore their rationales for investing in management development initiatives prior to adopting review and evaluation techniques.

One of the key advantages of this management development survey conducted in Ireland is that it is not context-specific. According to official data, 48 per cent of all employment in manufacturing firms in Ireland with three or more employees has been in multinational companies (Central Statistics Office, 2002). Therefore, managers in Ireland are becoming "international managers". For managers operating in countries experiencing similar conditions to Ireland the results should be relevant. In terms of the scope of our study, it encompasses a wide range of management development issues including quantitative measures, for example the volume of management development activity and is complemented by rich qualitative comments which give further meaning and insights into the state of contemporary management development in Ireland. The definition adopted for management development in this paper includes both the personal and career development of an individual manager, i.e. attendance at formal development programmes, seminars, conferences and also informal learning through methods such as coaching and mentoring etc. It also includes management education, which is achieved through formal undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications. As noted by Garavan (1997), there have been attempts to discuss and distinguish the terms development, education and learning, but he concludes that it is perhaps more appropriate to view training, development and education as an integrated whole, with the concept of learning as the glue which holds them together.

Background to the research

In early 2003, we initiated a study into current management development practices, policies and methods adopted by organisations in Ireland with a view to uncovering how organisations are actually developing their pool of management talent. General results have been published elsewhere in a report entitled *Management Development in Ireland*, published in 2004, and this paper unpacks some of the key findings with a view to exploring emerging themes in greater detail, and identifying further avenues for research.

Ireland at a glance – some facts and figures

Ireland, a member of the European Union (EU) since 1973, is an island economy in north-west Europe with a population of over 4 million (0.8 per cent of the total population of the EU). Government policy in Ireland has focused on attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) to Ireland since the 1960s. One of the most notable features of the economy over the past decade has been the leading role that has been played by foreign-owned multinational firms in generating output, exports and employment. Barry and Bradley (1997, p. 1) trace the development of multinational companies in Ireland and argue that "much of the history of the Irish economy... can be explained in terms of the quote phenomenal growth of export oriented FDI (foreign direct investment) in manufacturing . . . ". Between 1991 and 2001, the estimated Gross Value Added for Ireland increased three-fold to €103 billion with the manufacturing sector providing the largest contribution. In 2003 Ireland was 7th in the global league of countries attracting FDI and attracted some $25 billion, a 4 per cent increase on 2002 (UNCTAD, 2004).

When compared with both historical and international standards the economy of Ireland has performed exceptionally well in recent years. Such successes earned Ireland the title of "The Celtic Tiger" because of the rapid growth that the country experienced in the mid 1990s. Between 1993 and 2003, as highlighted in the Enterprise Strategy Group report, the following occurred:

- employment increased from 1.2 million to approximately 1.8 million (Central Statistics Office, 2003a);
- unemployment fell from over 15 per cent of the workforce to less than 5 per cent (Department of Finance, 2004);
- the value of exports increased from €28.5 billion to €109.3 billion (Central Statistics Office, 2003b);
- the national debt fell from 93 per cent of GNP to 34 per cent of GNP (Department of Finance, 2004); and
- GDP per capita rose from 69 per cent to 125 per cent of the EU-15 average in 2002; GNP per capita (a better measure of performance in Ireland's case)[1] rose from 75 per cent to 101 per cent of the EU average (Eurostat, 2003).

In terms of labour force participation rates, in 2003 1.86 million people aged 15 and over were economically active – representing a participation rate of 60 per cent, which has increased over the period 1998 to 2003. However, the continuous supply of a highly skilled labour force is a key issue that needs to be currently addressed.

The reasons for Ireland's success in the past point to external factors such as favourable exchange rates up to 2002, the growth of foreign direct investment and the positive effects of the growth in global trade. Domestic factors, for example Ireland's strategic policy decisions to improve human capital and encourage foreign direct investment from the 1960s, reforms of the public finances, reductions in taxation, wage moderation and finally demographic trends have all ensured that the labour supply did not limit growth potential. However, those safeguards can no longer yield the desired results in the future.

The link between economic growth and management development

Ireland is now a country in transition. As highlighted by the OECD in, 2003, the era of the "Celtic Tiger" is over and has given way to a more normal rate of expansion since 2001. Environmental challenges such as globalisation, a global shift to services, rising costs, demographic changes, changes in EU policies, environmental issues and access to finance are being experienced. Therefore, the model that worked for the enterprise economy in the past and delivered growth will have to be modified – Ireland will have to move from an investment-driven and production-based economy, to one which is market-led and knowledge-based. There is now the view that the future success of Ireland depends on the country's "ability to achieve an environment where research and knowledge, high skills and expertise, high quality infrastructure and business services are combined in a flexible and creative way" (NESC, 2003; Forfás, 2003).

However, for Ireland to become a "high skills economy" and a learning society necessitates a supply of highly-skilled people, which in turn requires an organisational commitment to lifelong training and learning. *The Lisbon Strategy* adopted by the European Council in 2000, has outlined a similar vision for the EU of becoming, by 2010 "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion". As Ireland moves to this knowledge-based economy, the primacy of management skills will become an increasing priority. The linkage between the development of management skills and a country's competitiveness is not tenuous, but instead very real and substantiated, as highlighted by Thomson *et al.* (2001, p. 1) "without adequate development of the management cadre, it has been accepted by policy-makers, companies and perhaps most important of all, managers themselves, that a modern industrial economy cannot maintain its competitiveness, that organizations cannot be sufficiently flexible to respond to the rapidly changing circumstances of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and that managers cannot adjust to career patterns considerably removed from the expectations of their predecessors". This issue was also reflected in the Enterprise Strategy Group report which commented that "the national pool of management talent and expertise has a huge bearing on the country's economic development" (Enterprise Strategy Group, 2005, p. 109).

Shortage of high-level skills

Ireland has been operating in a "catch up" situation when compared with other countries in the EU. Since the Single European Market was introduced in 1993 it became very apparent that there was a pressing need on the "Irish skills profile to mirror best European practice" (Roche and Tansey, 1992, p. 151). As noted in a report by Fás (the Irish national training and employment authority), in the early to mid-1990s the incidence of formal on-the-job training in Ireland was considerably lower, and the duration significantly shorter, than European counterparts (National Competitiveness Council, 1998; O'Connell and Lyons, 1995; Roche and Tansey, 1992; Culliton, 1992;). Skill shortages have become a key problem as highlighted in the White Paper on Adult Education (2000, p. 17) "skill shortages both in areas of new entrants into the workforce as well as the skills of those already in the workforce are now a major barrier to the sustainable development of the Irish economy". Fás sectoral studies have identified significant shortcomings in management skills and in other business-related skills (Fás, 2004). Central to the investment in training and development in Ireland is now the concept of lifelong and continuous learning for those already in employment.

The changing workplace – a move to continuous and lifelong learning

There are numerous drivers of change which are exerting power over organisations and are having a direct impact on the workplace including increasing competition, changing and more fluid industry boundaries, rapid technological change, international legislative and regulatory changes, increasing awareness and expectations, increasing demands for better quality, and changes in the profile of the workforce. These factors, on their own, will exert a powerful influence on the workplace. However, when combined, they have the capacity to transform the world of work (NCPP, 2003). These changes have direct implications for managers, who must consider the type of management style and organisational culture needed in a changing competitive landscape. For employees, demands will be placed on them to keep their skills current and to engage in life long learning. Employers must therefore provide access to training and development opportunities (NCPP, 2003). According to a HR survey in Ireland conducted by IBEC, the Irish Business and Employers Confederation, the top HR priority for companies is training and development (IBEC, 2004) which is to be welcomed. Against this backdrop of economic and training developments in Ireland, the current state of management development is explored.

Previous studies

The development of Irish managers has received increased attention since the Galvin Report was published in 1988 (Galvin, 1988). That report called for the professionalisation of Irish management, highlighting an urgent need for an increased commitment on a macro level to management development. Galvin produced a list of recommendations which included *inter alia*:

- an increased commitment to management development as an urgent national priority;
- guidelines and a code of good practice to be endorsed and promoted; and
- providers of business education should offer a broadly common curriculum.

Galvin called for a national mindset which proactively advocates, promotes and supports management development. This was directly related to his firm belief that effective managers would be crucial to Ireland's economic success. In 2000 the Open University highlighted that since the publication of the Galvin Report some aspects of management development have improved noticeably, while others have not, stating "a major focus of concern is the effectiveness and quality of the training and development being undertaken by companies, large and small, in all sectors" (Open University, 2000, p. 6). Other studies on management development in the Irish context include work by Heraty and Morley (2003) and Garavan *et al.* (1999). This paper builds on these works by adding currency and additional insights into the current state of management development in Ireland.

Organisational rationales for investing in management development

The reasons why organisations actually invest in management development initiatives are infrequently addressed in both the literature and in practice. It is very much the situation that "management development as an activity is usually presented as desirable both to the individual and the organization. It is offered as 'value-free' and rarely are the implicit assumptions which support management development given attention" (Hopfl and Dawes, 1995, p. 19).

A large body of research has been undertaken on the provision and impact of management development, learning and educational interventions. Very little work, however, has been undertaken which explores organisational rationales for investing time and resources in developing managers, particularly those that do not purport to improve management functioning and corporate performance (Garavan *et al.*, 1999). Perhaps the most substantial attempt to develop a taxonomy of organisational rationales for investing in management development is provided by Lees (1992). At the outset of his exploration of the "faces" of management development, Lees emphasises that there are many levels of complexity associated with the issue. These are driven by the following issues:

- management development itself is a nebulous concept and attracts multiple and sometimes inconsistent definitions;
- the outcomes of management development are difficult to measure;
- stakeholders in management development have differing expectations of what it will deliver; and
- stakeholders are likely to select diverse sets of criteria to assess management development (Lees, 1992, p. 89).

Despite these difficulties, Lees exhorts the importance of exploring these rationales, as the managers who entrust resources to management development "do so according to some internal rationale and justification, with some sense of its significance for the organisation, and with a spectrum of expectations from the overt to the hidden" (Lees, 1992, pp. 89-90). Moreover, Lees believes that an exploration of this subjective "internal rationality" can uncover organisational reasons for backing management development that are deeper than any "examination of espoused goals, statements of intention, or other piece of public rhetoric" (Lees, 1992, p. 90).

Lees' presentation of the rationales for organisational investment in management development as "faces" is based on observed comments, observations and interpretations that he noted over a twenty-year period. Interestingly, he comments that material for these constructs presented at moments of informal distraction, rather than in formal contexts: the vehicle by which they have presented is a "slip" during a conversation, rather than a sought-after answer. These "off-the-record" pronouncements often communicated negative feelings and concerns about management development. Lees' interlocutors reported difficulties in recruiting line managers to engage in management development interventions, organisational procedures did not co-operate with the system and often line managers expressed doubts about the actual apparatus for the development processes.

Lees recognises that managers carry the culture of their organisation with them into their management development intervention, and this in turn highlights how the management development arena is useful in understanding how organisational culture affects management learning:

> Yet managers sponsored for development carry into the education or training context much of the socio-political domains of the organisations, and those domains are not difficult to access. Course members, their management development managers, and personnel/HRM chiefs are thus a potentially rich source of pickings on the multiple and often conflicting goals of management development (Lees, 1992, p. 91).

Lees' ten organisational rationales, or faces, are outlined in Table I.

Face	Rationale
Functional performance	To directly improve managerial functioning and, as a result of this, corporate performance
Agricultural	To internally cultivate improved managerial functioning
Functional-defensive	To develop reservoirs of knowledge in well-established organisations
Socialisation	To socialise managers into the corporate ethos, language and worldview
Political reinforcement	To extend the political order of the organisation, as defined by senior management, to all levels of management in the organisation
Organisational inheritance	To regulate and administer organisational succession
Environmental legitimacy	To establish conformity with environmental myths
Compensation	To offer compensation for the deprivations of employment and creating environments where managerial learning is normalised
Psychic defence	To safeguard the organisation from possible negative effects of "agricultural" management development
Ceremonial	To provide rituals to mark managers' journeys through their organisation

Source: Lees (1992)

Table I. The ten faces of management development

The fact that the rationales for continual investment by organisations in management development still remains an unchallenged concept ten years after Lees surfaced the issue (Paauwe and Williams, 2001) provides the impetus for conducting more research in this area. It has been pointed out in the literature that only two (or perhaps three) of these rationales are concerned with improving corporate performance (Garavan *et al.*, 1999). It is also noteworthy that these faces express the rationales for investing in management development from an organisational perspective. Lees has hinted that managers in organisations, the prospective participants in management learning interventions, afford a different level of priority to management development. Interestingly, Heraty and Morley (2003) highlight the fact that management development has two mandates to satisfy, commenting that "... management development has a dual remit – an organizational role that requires certain competencies to perform their job effectively and a free agent role that encourages managers to build their career portfolio" (Heraty and Morley, 2003, p. 73)

The existence of continued investment in management development, despite reservations about how it improves corporate performance, may provide an opportunity to investigate how it encapsulates aspects of an organisational culture. For example, the decision to perpetuate this type of investment may signify its relevance as a value. Hofstede (2001), who states that systems of values are a core element of culture, describes these as broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others.

Lees uses the term faces to label the rationales he unearthed. The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition for rationale is "a set of reasons or a logical basis for a course of action or a particular belief." Lees' usage of the term "face" appears to have arisen from how the rationale is presented to the individual manager by the culture of the organisation. At the outset of the paper he writes: "Largely overlooked has been the internal organisational perspective on management development – what it 'looks like' to managers on the inside" (Lees, 1992, p. 89).

Management development methods – the formal versus informal debate

A report by the Open University (2000, p. 13), referred to earlier, defines formal management development as including "training programmes, on or off-site; short or long courses supported by the company; seminars or conferences". In contrast, the report defines informal development as "that which could be described as '*ad-hoc*' in respect of any activity which might be seen as generally useful, but not clearly linked to either organisational objectives or identified individual requirements". Mumford (1997) highlights the fact that informal development can, and should include experiential and accidental learning which takes place in an unplanned way in the course of everyday work. The popularity of informal management development methods has come to the fore in the literature:

> . . . there is evidence that the focus of management development has shifted to emphasise activities such as coaching, action learning, natural learning, self developmental processes and other peer-related activities. The concept itself has broadened to emphasise development of the whole person rather than the acquisition of competencies for a particular role (Garavan *et al.*, 1999, p. 204).

Evaluating management development initiatives

The management development literature devotes a lot of attention to the issue of evaluation and reviewing management development activities. Justifying an investment in management development is a key priority for trainers due to financial pressures as highlighted by Easterby-Smith (1994) who suggests that economic pressures are putting an onus on the evaluator to prove the value of training and other developmental activities. According to Burgoyne and Reynolds (1997) one of the apparent paradoxes of the management learning industry is its continuing success and growth in material terms which has taken place against a background of continuing criticism and doubt about its aims, methods and effectiveness. Easterby-Smith (1994) acknowledges this difficulty in establishing a statistical link between management development activities and organisation performance. He emphasises the fact that if management development is to be effective in meeting individual needs and delivering organisational goals, the process must be evaluated to make judgements about its cost effectiveness and to aid organisational learning and improvement. Thomson *et al.* (2001) echoed this point stating that ideally organisations should be periodically reviewing their management training activities as well as their succession planning and fast-track programmes. When Lees listed ten rationales for investing in management development, it was interesting to note that only two or three linked directly to corporate performance (as identified by Garavan *et al.*, 1999). This therefore uncovers the issue that improving corporate performance is only one of potentially many rationales for investing in management development.

In examining the success of management development initiatives Hogan and Warrenfeltz (2003) highlighted the importance of a manager's level of self-awareness by pointing to the fact that there are differences in relation to the "educability of managers" and their "malleability", stating that although executive education focuses on technical and financial issues, the authors believe that the big mistakes in careers and organisations result from a lack of knowledge of a different kind – from gaps in self-awareness.

Models for evaluating management development

This section examines both quantitative approaches and an organisation development (OD) approach to evaluating management development and finishes by providing some recommendations on evaluation for organisations operating in Ireland.

Quantitative approaches to management development

Numerous models exist in relation to evaluating management development activities, for example the classic evaluation model designed by Kirkpatrick (as described in Thomson *et al.* 2001) which assesses the impact of training in four-levels of evaluation:

(1) the trainees' reaction;

(2) an assessment of learning via a follow-up questionnaire or focus group;

(3) impact on subsequent job performance which is often reviewed at appraisal; and

(4) long-term impact on business, as indicated by such measures as customer feedback, productivity outcomes, attitude surveys and achieving organisational targets.

Bee and Bee (1994) describe various quantitative approaches for measuring the cost effectiveness of training. They suggest that there are two fundamental questions to be addressed:

(1) Has the training been delivered in the most cost-effective way?

(2) Do the benefits of the training outweigh the costs?

With regard to the second question, they describe the application for evaluation of standard investment appraisal techniques which are more commonly associated with capital expenditure by firms, namely internal rate of return and calculation of net present value. Application of such techniques is of course contingent on availability of data and they thus describe two approaches in this regard, namely use of performance indicators (e.g. increase in sales, reduction of costs, etc.); and application of what they describe as a "value-added approach" (e.g. applying some financial value to the gain in competence of a manager resulting from his attendance at a particular course).

The Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership (2002) point out that many of the benefits that programmes intend to deliver take time to materialise. They therefore introduced the technique termed the "milestone approach", in which real time indicators are established that show whether the unfolding implementation of the programme is running according to expectation or whether something needs adjusting. The various indicators could include: identifiable short-term benefits, performance management measures, employee retention, above average career progression, etc.

One of the very few studies which report the specific impact of management development in quantifiable terms using empirical data is that of Mabey (2002). He used a multivariate technique (structural equation modelling) to examine and specify the relationships between the various constructs (structural context, management development processes, volume and types of management training and development, and management development outcomes) which are most likely to influence the way in which management training is delivered and perceived in an organisation. Interestingly, Mabey's model showed that the perceived success of management development and the perceived impact upon the organisation was due largely to the amount (of training/development) undertaken. He cautions however that this may be in part due to the fact that, as training for managers in the UK was largely neglected until the early 1990s, against this poor reference point, managers were likely to register any development as a relative and distinct improvement.

OD approach to evaluating management development

Easterby-Smith (1994) describes and summarises the OD approach which generally involves either case study reviews or wider empirical reviews of management development interventions in organisations. The OD approach is not without complexity and problems, however; and he identifies some of the pitfalls which can occur in the OD approach:

- difficulty in agreeing the conceptual boundaries of what is to be investigated;
- selecting appropriate techniques and procedures for large and complex organisational contexts;
- the linkage which often can exist between the success/failure of a particular management development initiative and the impact this can have on the jobs/careers of the employees who were actively engaged in promoting the initiative;
- difficulty in demonstrating the right organisation-wide changes; and
- distinguishing between actions undertaken as part of the intervention and research conducted as part of the evaluation.

Burgoyne (1988) outlines a six-level model of management development policy which ranges from level 1 (no planned management development) to level 6 (where a management development perspective inputs and illuminates corporate policy). For Pedlar *et al.* (1997) the success (economic or otherwise) of any management development policy is dictated by its contribution to how the organisation performs as a learning organisation. In their view this is only possible at the higher levels of their six-level model of management development policy.

Methodology

Our study comprised:

(1) Three semi-structured interviews which were conducted with HR/training managers predominantly from organisations included in the *Business and Finance* top 1000 performing companies in Ireland. These interviews were conducted between May and August 2003. The organisations interviewed were predominantly from the private sector and represented a range of industries including financial services, food, pharmaceuticals and communications. Interviewees were questioned on a number of areas including their

organisation's management development policies, methods, practices, career structures and the evaluation and review of management development initiatives.

(2) A postal questionnaire which was distributed to a sample of the HR and training management population in Ireland. The questionnaires were distributed to 250 organisations and completed by 53, representing a 21.2 per cent response rate (see Table II). The questionnaire covered management development methods, delivery mechanisms, and strategic issues encompassing the future of management development and the return on management development spend.

Respondents were asked to classify the ownership status of their organisation (see Table III)

Respondents were asked to indicate how many people (full-time equivalents) their organisation currently employs in Ireland (see Table IV).

The analyses detailed in the following sections draw on results obtained from a combination of the face-to-face interviews and the postal questionnaires. Quotes from respondents are also included where appropriate throughout the remainder of this paper.

Sector	Frequency	Valid (%)
Agriculture/food	3	5.9
Communications	2	3.9
Energy and water	1	2.0
Pharmaceutical/chemical	6	11.8
Transport/distribution	1	2.0
Banking /finance/venture capital/insurance	7	13.7
Construction	1	2
Engineering	3	5.9
Manufacturing	7	13.7
Retailing	2	3.9
Software/electronics/technology	8	15.7
Other services	6	11.8
Other	4	7.8
Not answered	2	

Table II.
Sectoral breakdown of respondents

Ownership status	Frequency	Valid (%)
Irish privately owned	12	22.6
Irish publicly quoted	4	7.5
Public sector	5	9.4
Multinational subsidiary	31	58.5
Other	1	1.9

Table III.
Ownership status of organisations

Results

Organisational rationales for investing in management development

Our respondent organisations had numerous stated rationales for investing in management development. The key factors which encouraged management development investment activity included:

- buy-in from senior management;
- business efficiency;
- corporate support;
- organisation strategy;
- organisation culture;
- demand from managers themselves;
- training awards; and
- competitive behaviour of organisations.

For the respondent companies potential barriers to investing in management development interventions included: cost of management development programmes; time; and ability to measure impact/return on investment.

As one can see from the above rationales for investing in management development and the associated barriers, the majority of the issues are internal factors. The culture of the organisation came to the fore quite strongly in our study as an important issue which encourages management development investment and corresponds to Lees rationale for investing in development initiatives[2]. Managers highlighted the fact that they invest in management development in order to bring about change, which may include a change in culture. Chief executive and senior management "buy in" was viewed as being crucial in order to positively influence the amount of management development undertaken and create an organisational culture which supports development.

> The "buy in" of senior managers is absolutely crucial. If managers aren't supportive, aren't coaching their people or regularly reviewing development as part of performance reviews it's very difficult for development to succeed. That is such a critical factor. Our development is of no value if that's not happening. We do need that sort of culture. (Comment from interview respondent (HR manager).)

> We have a strong culture of supporting development, not just management development – 10 per cent of our population every year would be doing some form of funded and supported external programme on top of the 7 per cent of the working year that they put into internal programmes. We have a pretty strong practice backing up our culture in terms of delivering what we say we are delivering. (Comment from interview respondent (HR Director).)

Number of employees	Frequency	Valid (%)	Cumulative (%)
≤ 250	16	31.4	31.4
251-1,000	22	43.1	74.5
1,001-5,000	12	23.5	98.0
>5,000	1	2.0	100
Not answered	2		

Table IV. Size of organisations

The organisations in our study were of the view that the retention of managers was no longer as powerful a force for positively influencing the amount of management development activity compared to a few years ago.

Aligning management development needs to business strategy

In our study, the organisations interviewed were asked the question "how far do you believe your organisation's management development policy reflects its business strategy?". Thomson *et al.* (2001) would recommend that an organisation should align their management development needs to the organisation's business strategy. A sample of the comments received from respondents can be viewed below:

> Our management development policy totally reflects our business strategy. We have purposely conducted this large scale TNA [training needs analysis] at the same time as our business planning cycle. We have totally aligned both. In any of the sessions we have with individuals we always start from the point " what are your business objectives?". We would never do something that is not aligned with where the business is going.

> We do an organisational training needs analysis and an individual needs analysis. They happen at the same time and it's done as part of our annual planning cycle in Q4 for the forthcoming calendar year and then that translates into a budget which occurs practically simultaneously.

> It's in all of our strategy. Development is a key priority for us. So it would definitely reflect the strategy going forward."

> It's there to meet the company's objectives.

> No. We wouldn't really plan for management development and the business together. They would be separate in the main. It would be nice to think that they would run in tandem.

> Well, it's not that it doesn't reflect the strategy. I think the strategy is there in writing but I don't know how well it's carried out in every day business. So it doesn't reflect what they aim for their strategy to be i.e. that it's developing your key people in line with the business. I don't think there's much emphasis on it. I think with management development senior management see it as something that "has to cost us money". For some reason they see it as a cost rather than a long-term investment. I don't think it reflects what they try and make you believe for what they stand for.

The above comments highlight the fact that some organisations appear to be successfully aligning their business strategy and management development needs. However, there are some comments of a less positive nature suggesting that the linkage between management development and business strategy is at best tenuous in some organisations. This gives rise to concern, indicating an urgency for some organisations to actively align their business and management development strategies. In order to create an integrated model of management development it is advisable that the organisation's management development policy reflects its business strategy. Ideally, business issues should be taken as the driver of management development and each new strategic initiative should simultaneously trigger a management development activity.

From our study it emerged that management development initiatives in many organisations in Ireland are often *ad-hoc*, conducted on a "needs basis" and are quite reactive in nature. Piecemeal and fragmented efforts are evident. However, there was evidence in our research to suggest that some organisations are adopting a systems perspective in that they view management development as an integral part of a wider organisational system and linked to the context and reality of managerial work, employing both formal and informal methods.

Volume of management development activity

In order to analyse management development activities of organisations we asked companies to indicate how many days per annum their organisations spent on formal management development. It was initially hoped to also report the management development spend of organisations, but this was not achieved for two pragmatic reasons:

(1) A reluctance of some organisations to reveal their accrued expenditure.

(2) For comparative purposes it was deemed too complex to investigate management development spend due to the fact that there are many methods employed by organisations for calculating such costs. It was therefore decided instead to calculate the average number of days dedicated by organisations to management development[3].

Organisations reported that the average number of days spent by managers in Ireland on management development is approximately 6.1 days for junior/middle managers and 5.9 days for senior managers, which indicates that there were on average no major differences reported by management level. The minimum number of days recorded for development was one day for both groups with the maximum reaching 15 days for junior/middle managers, and 17 for senior. It was striking that in some organisations senior managers spent more days on development, while in other organisations there was a tendency for junior/middle managers to dedicate more time to development. These figures are similar to those reported by the Open University (2000) which stated that organisations are dedicating five days to training with best practice organisations in Europe reporting 5.7 days.

Management development methods

From our research, the most popular management development methods adopted by organisations are personal skills training (particularly for junior/middle managers), and conferences/seminars and management programmes (particularly among senior managers). In terms of education, more junior/middle managers are currently undertaking undergraduate qualifications. This is presumably because senior managers have already achieved such qualifications. Although coaching and mentoring were only ranked in fifth position for all management levels, they are methods which are gaining momentum. Many organisations commented that in the future they would be engaging in executive coaching and mentoring on a broader scale. A significant percentage of organisations (51 per cent) in our sample are not involved in developing their managers through personal profiling and self-awareness courses. Again, many organisations remarked that the personal development of managers would become more of a common feature in their organisations in the future.

The top three management development methods (see Table V and Figure 1) adopted by junior/middle managers in our survey were:

(1) personal skills training;
(2) conferences/seminars; and
(3) management development programmes.

The top three management development methods adopted by senior managers were:

(1) conferences/seminars;
(2) management development programmes; and
(3) personal skills training.

Formal versus informal methods of management development
In our study management development in organisations appears to be predominantly formal but informal methods are also playing a vital role. Organisations emphasised the importance of informal methods and the "hidden benefits" that managers receive from informal methods. However, they generally stated that development in their organisations would be predominantly formal.

Table V. Management development methods

	Junior managers	Middle senior managers
Personal skills training	1	3
Conferences/seminars	2	1
Management development programmes	3	2
Undergraduate qualifications	4	6
Coaching/mentoring	5	5
Postgraduate qualifications	6	4
Personal profiling/self awareness	7	7

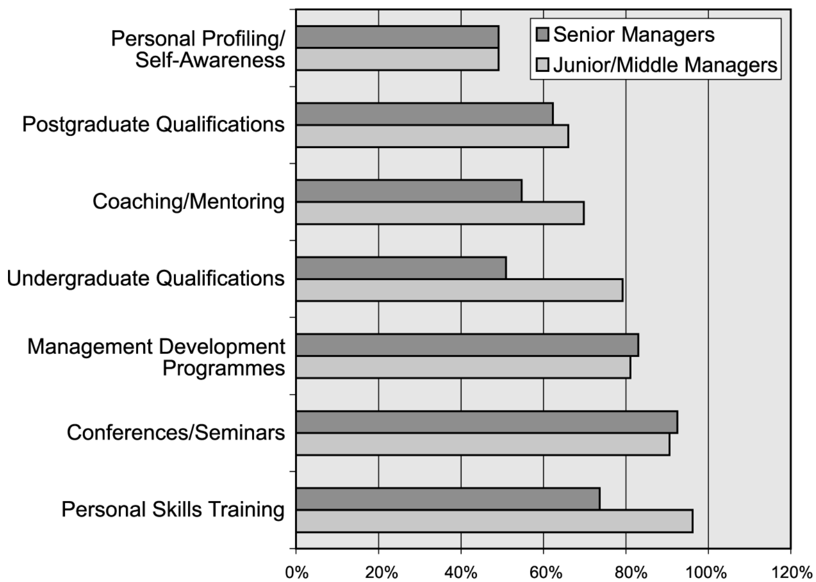

Figure 1. Management development methods

Organisations also mentioned the benefits derived from action-based learning, job rotation, international secondments and developmental activities such as chairing groups and taking part in task forces and cross-functional teams. As already stated, the usage of informal methods such as mentoring and coaching is gaining momentum. A respondent from a pharmaceutical company also referred to the benefit gained from employee involvement as a developmental tool mentioning a system whereby in their company they train managers who are working in laboratories to become "internal auditors" and audit the company's HR methods procedures etc. This was viewed as a key developmental tool for these managers and trained them to "see outside of the box".

Delivery methods

Organisations in our study were using a variety of delivery methods to successfully provide developmental programmes for their managers. Development was delivered predominantly by a combination of either the company's own training department, an external provider or public course. It was striking that many organisations were beginning to focus more on using their "in-house trainers" to engage in more developmental activities with managers. It was also noteworthy that when embarking on a new developmental programme, organisations often employ external providers but as the programme progresses the company tends to take more ownership of the programme and delivers it through the auspices of their own training department.

> We are going to make more use of our in-house trainers. In the future we will have more internal development through facilitation, coaching and mentoring in order to provide better leadership for our company. (Comment from interview respondent (HR Manager).)

E-learning did not feature as a popular delivery method in our study, but respondent organisations have not dismissed its potential usage in the future. The adoption of e-learning delivery methods for developmental purposes is currently quite low. Many organisations commented that they could see their organisations providing more of their programmes through e-learning in the future. A few organisations stated that they would be increasing their usage of e-learning as a delivery method, highlighting the benefits that it provides, including building awareness and enhancing technical skills. Other organisations mentioned the fact that they would be avoiding e-learning in the future as they felt that managers achieved greater benefit from development which offers more personal interaction.

The development of high-potential managers and the emergence of succession planning

From discussions with organisations in our study it emerged that there is a strong linkage between management development and career progression. Many organisations are developing their managers in order to promote internally and to create a pool of successors for managers who either leave or retire. However, it was surprising to see that planned career structures did not appear to be a feature of the respondent organisations with only one out of 13 organisations stating that they have a planned structure in place with a few organisations stating that they were "getting there".

However, respondent organisations stated that they were actively embarking on the introduction of succession plans and viewed it as a trigger for management development initiatives. From the 13 organisations interviewed, seven stated that they have a succession plan in place whilst the remaining six organisations stated that they did not have a plan but it would be an issue that they would actively broach.

In relation to recruitment, organisations were asked whether they believed that managers in their organisation were generally recruited for a job or a career – nine organisations explicitly stated that managers were recruited for a career while four stated that they felt that managers were being recruited for a particular job. This indicates that organisations in our sample are wishing to internally promote their managers which could in turn lead to additional development of these managers. This correlates to what Lees (1992) refers to as the "agricultural" rationale for investing in management development, which focuses on the need to cultivate and grow managers internally.

Organisations were unanimous in declaring that managers themselves have the responsibility for their own career development. They emphasised the fact that while the organisation provides supports such as time-off, funding etc, the responsibility in relation to careers rests primarily with managers themselves.

Our respondent organisations are actively identifying and developing their high-potential managers. Of the 13 organisations interviewed, nine organisations stated that they identify their managers with high potential or "the high fliers" while four organisations do not. The survey data also correlates with these interview findings which reported that 74 per cent of organisations (39 out of 53 organisations) do identify high potential managers, who may be identified either by formal or informal means (see Figure 2). These managers are then placed on a fast track for more intensive development by most organisations. However, one organisation made the interesting comment that often ironically the high potential managers who are being earmarked for commencing undergraduate/postgraduate qualifications are often the population that cannot afford the time due to family commitments.

Responsibility for management development and priority awarded

In relation to initiating management development initiatives, from our sample it became apparent that most management development activities are initiated predominately by central HR which may also be responding to directives at the corporate, board or chief executive level. In terms of implementing management development policies, there is a move towards a shared responsibility between central HR and the line/unit manager. Organisations highlighted the fact that they are increasingly trying to devolve responsibility down to line managers but are finding it a difficult task to put into practice. HR managers are increasingly finding that line managers are often deficient in relation to the skills required for the developmental process and are also lacking in time

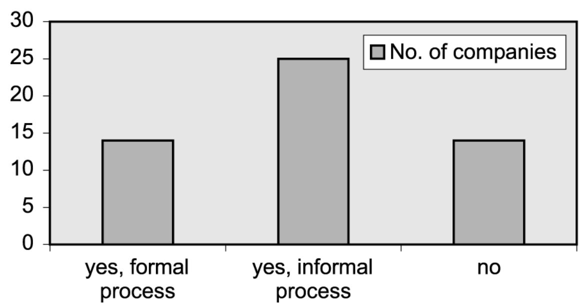

Figure 2.
Identification of high potential managers

to devote to such processes or fail to include it among their list of priorities. A few organisations highlighted that at lower management levels the organisation will drive development but at higher levels the managers themselves will drive it. Of the 13 organisations interviewed it was striking that all of the organisations offered managers funding for completing relevant undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications. They also supported them by giving time-off to conduct their studies.

In terms of priority in relation to management development, seven organisations stated that they see it as becoming more of a priority for their organisation with five organisations viewing it as "staying the same", while only one organisation reported that it is becoming less of a priority. The overall results were positive.

Reviewing and evaluating management development activities

Organisations in our research reported that management development does have a positive impact on a multitude of organisational areas, infiltrating the very fibres of the organisation. It was stated that management development, especially attendance at public courses, allows organisations to become more aware of the practices which competitors are adopting and allows new ideas to be exchanged and benchmarking to occur. No organisation stated that management development had an overall negative impact on their organisation. These findings concur with the Open University (2000) who asked firms to rate the impact of management development on their organisations: 56 per cent of firms awarded it a rank of 4 or 5 (5 being the highest impact on a scale from 1 to 5) while only 9 per cent of firms awarded it a value of less than 2.

In our study, respondent organisations felt that management development is positively impacting on individual and business performance but that the link is tenuous. They viewed it as a key lever in bringing about individual and organisational change. Many organisations did not directly equate management development with measurable financial benefits, stating that the impact is difficult to measure and that there is a complexity in relation to disentangling the effects of management development from other initiatives. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that organisations, in order to ensure that they are satisfied with their current management development initiatives, should review and evaluate their development activities.

In our study it emerged that some organisations are reviewing their management development activities by using a combination of formal and informal methods which have both a short and long-term impact. The 13 organisations which were interviewed were asked to report on how they review their management development activities. The formal methods used included some of the following:

- appraisals (conducted by 12 of the 13 organisations interviewed), 360 degree feedback processes and annual reviews;
- training needs analysis (conducted by 11 of the 13 companies interviewed) and training plans for individuals; and
- questionnaires ("happy sheets"), surveys with trainees;

Informal processes used included:

- consultation with line managers;
- consultation with trainees; and
- consultation with training managers and training providers.

Respondents indicated that for reviewing management development activities a lot of subjectivity is involved, i.e. a "feel good factor" on behalf of the trainees.

The importance of the manager's frame of mind and level of self-awareness came to the fore in the research as an issue to consider when reviewing and choosing management development activities. In relation to evaluating management development, one organisation highlighted that a manager's self-awareness has a direct impact on the success of a management development programme stating:

> . . . you have to bear in mind that different individuals respond differently to different learning environments. You could throw all the training in the world at some individuals and they'll never perform any better. The course could be excellent but if the individual doesn't have the right frame of mind it could fail. So before an organisation embarks on training, it needs to assess how open it is to training and how aware they are.

This finding correlates to the issue of the malleability and educability of managers' as highlighted by Hogan and Warrenfeltz (2003).

As we stated earlier, evaluating the return on investment on management development spend can be extremely problematic. In response to our survey, 16 out of 53 organisations stated that they do not measure the impact of management development spend, whilst 31 do (six organisations also failed to respond to the question). Some organisations in our study are actively evaluating management development in terms of organisational objectives and business goals. Many organisations are also investing in their managers in order to meet succession plans and recruit internally and are therefore using a combination of evaluative methods which require both a short-term and a long-term focus. However, a lot of subjective methods are also used, for example feedback from managers. It also emerged that it is difficult to evaluate whether a transfer of learning has actually taken place, i.e. have managers actually incorporated what they learned on the management development initiative and transferred it back into the workplace.

Evaluation of management development in an Irish context

In relation to the organisations that were interviewed and those that completed the postal questionnaires, all stages of Kirkpatrick's evaluation model were evident in the management development review systems in some organisations i.e. they evaluated management development in relation to job performance and the long-term impact on the business. However, it was clear from the responses or lack of responses from managers in relation to the return on investment of management development spend, that some companies are merely on step one or two of his model, i.e. using subjective techniques such as trainee reactions or follow-up questionnaires etc. This highlights the fact that many organisations are quite a step away from creating an integrated management development model.

While many organisations in our study are now beginning to plan or structure their management development activities (corresponding to step 1 of the evaluation model as described by Burgoyne, 1988, in Pedlar et al, 1997), they have quite a journey to make in order to reach the sixth step of the model, where management development is illuminating corporate policy. The findings of our study correspond to the Open University (2000) who found that much management training in Ireland is "informal" or "*ad hoc* and occasional" and that management development is not approached in a planned or systematic way by a majority of firms.

Mabey (2002) highlighted three important issues when evaluating management development:

(1) that it needs contextualisation (depending on sector, size etc.);

(2) that intra-organisational features have even a greater influence over the formulisation and implementation of human resource development; and

(3) that when assessing outputs, numerical measures of training days need to be supplemented by other qualitative measures and that organisations should perhaps assess how successful the management development intervention has been on creating managerial capabilities.

When applied to the Irish context, these three issues as raised by Mabey (2002), highlight the following three important points:

(1) Organisations in Ireland should be benchmarking themselves against companies of a similar size, operating within the same sector with similar structures etc. There was evidence in our study to suggest that some organisations are actively doing this and are benchmarking against their competitors in relation to management development activities, while other organisations are only adopting a narrower internal focus.

(2) Since intra-organisational features have a great influence over the formulation and implementation of human resource development, it is recommended that organisations in Ireland should examine the internal factors which are encouraging/discouraging management development in their organisations. This examination should be complemented by an examination of the responsibility given to management development, as well as the processes for diagnosing and monitoring the effects of such activities.

(3) A combination of qualitative and quantitative assessment measures should be used in relation to evaluating management development. Mabey (2002) advised that numerical measures of training days should be supplemented by other qualitative measures. Although many organisations in our study do calculate the number of training days which managers should undertake per year, it was evident from interviewing organisations that they do not place a lot of emphasis on this measure. They stated that they would not stick rigidly to such numeric measures, preferring instead to be more responsive to a need and that the number of training days would tend to fluctuate on a yearly basis.

Instead, respondent organisations persist in the use of subjective measures to evaluate management development. Indeed this is often the case in an international context. For example, Ghoshal and Bruch (2004, p. 44) reported that "Lufthansa has never measured the precise payback from its school of business, but the subjective judgement of top management is that the return has been much higher than the investment". Subjective methods do have value and play an important role in reviewing and evaluating management development activities. However, it is worrying when these techniques are the sole devices used for review and evaluative purposes. This therefore raises the point that organisations are in need of techniques to aid them to assess the success of a development intervention. A "milestone approach" as advocated by the Council for

Excellence in Management and Leadership (2002) or an OD approach may offer some assistance for organisations.

Conclusions

There are a number of conclusions that can be drawn from our study. Evidence is provided to suggest that organisations are both concerned for their management population, see their development as a key priority and are willing to invest in them. Organisations are generally viewing their management population as being central in leading their organisations through the changing competitive environment, where the rules of "survival of the fittest" prevail. They are viewing management development as a key lever for change thus indicating a positive outlook for management development in Ireland.

Organisations are experimenting with the usage of numerous developmental methods and are particularly aware of the benefits of informal methods. However, many of our respondent organisations appear to continue to adopt *ad-hoc* approaches to management development, failing to fully integrate management development into their organisations. They are merely resorting to management development on a "needs basis". Such reactive steps should be replaced by more proactive and formalised actions. Many organisations did insist that in the future they would be taking a more focused, targeted and strategic approach to management development.

In relation to the evaluation of management development initiatives it was highlighted that the literature devotes a lot of attention to the issue of evaluating management development spend. This is understandable in a climate where the justification of budgetary spend has to be presented numerically with a clear "cause and effect" relationship being outlined. The focus of the debate generally veers towards a discussion around quantifiable measures that lead to increased corporate performance. However in reality, in most scenarios, management development may indirectly lead to increased corporate performance. For example, if a management development initiative helps to develop leaders who guide people through change initiatives, how can one directly quantify the outcome of this initiative? Perhaps, the OD approach may be appropriate in this instance. The implication of this for organisations is that in evaluating management development initiatives they need to firstly assert the rationale(s) for the management development initiative as opposed to trying to "reverse engineer" and numerically justify initiatives which often ignore the true rationale i.e. the rationale for the management development initiative should be the starting point for the evaluation of any management development intervention. As highlighted by Lees (1992) there are numerous rationales for investing in management development (political reinforcement, ceremonial, etc.) and they do not all necessarily include direct monetary rewards.

Survival for organisations in Ireland, as elsewhere, in the current changing competitive landscape is an uphill struggle. Surmounting the kaleidoscope of changes which they are presently confronted by is not an easy task. Management development is an important tool which organisations can use to both defend themselves and excel in the current business climate, thus buttressing their strategic positions. Used effectively in an integrated manner it can lead to numerous organisational and individual rewards and act as a lever for implementing change, propelling organisations into desirable positions. The challenge for organisations is to meet both organisational and individual developmental needs to ensure that they are "given centrality in organisational life" (Heraty and Morley, 2003, p. 77).

Notes

1. GDP gives an inflated impression of Irish income, as it includes profits repatriated by the Irish operations of foreign-owned enterprises to their parent companies.
2. The culture of the organisation may also be a barrier to investing in management development.
3. It should be noted that the majority of our survey respondents were able to estimate how many days are dedicated to management development in their organisations. However, the organisations interviewed showed a reluctance to give a specific figure, being of the view that it would vary from year to year and that development would be conducted on a "needs basis".

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