Evaluating the Effectiveness of Line Management Training
Research Plan

Motivation for the Evaluation

In the Civil Service, there are over 100,000 line managers. Research from other settings suggests that the quality of management is a key predictor of organisational productivity (e.g. Bloom et all, 2013). An effective civil service thus requires effective management by its line managers.

With this in mind, Government Skills has commissioned four large-scale training programmes – Foundation, Practitioner, Senior Practitioner and Achieving your Potential – to upskill civil servants from across civil service departments in line management.

This document sets out a research plan to evaluate – through a process and impact evaluation – whether these trainings are effective at upskilling civil servants in line management, as well as the impacts this has on workforce outcomes such as promotions and team productivity, and how the trainings could be improved further. The evaluation is conducted by academics at University College London, with extensive expertise in using surveys, interviews, focus groups, workforce data analysis and field experiments to robustly evaluate training programme processes and effectiveness.

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Evaluation Design

The evaluation design is based on careful theories of change developed for each programme.

All four programmes will be evaluated using:

● Pre-post surveys with all training participants, which measure the extent to which participants after the training (relative to before the training): (i) gain greater competence in line management: (ii) shift attitudes towards line management; (iii) gain greater peer networks; and (iv) change their line management practices towards good practice. The surveys also assess how these effects vary by training delivery model, and by demographic characteristics of participants.

● Interviews and focus groups with a sub-set of participants, as well as participant observation (shadowing) of select training sessions, to understand the process through which training achieves (or fails to achieve) learning and broader impacts on line management practices in the civil service, and to understand how different components of the training design and delivery could be optimized to achieve better outcomes for different learners.

In addition, as detailed next, the evaluation will explore several innovations in evaluation design.

Innovations to improve training evaluation practices in the civil service

Beyond informing line management trainings, the evaluation seeks to improve approaches to training evaluation in government more generally, and serve as a catalyst for better future training evaluations in government. The project includes several innovations to advance this aim:

● Training programmes are typically evaluated as individual programmes, even when programmes cover complementary topics and skills. This project will assess the feasibility of a combined programme-level and suite-level evaluation of multiple line management trainings. The suite-level evaluation assesses the way by which programmes function as a collective group of training products in developing line management skills.

- To overcome problems with low response rates in training evaluation surveys, training participants receive a confidential, personalised management diagnostic after completing the training survey, which they can then discuss in class with their training facilitator and peers. This provides training participants with a strong incentive to complete the survey, to be able to participate in class discussions and receive personalized feedback.
- For the upcoming "Achieving your Potential" training programme, the project will assess the feasibility of conducting a wait-listed randomised control trial (RCT), by randomly assigning interested training participants to participate in the training earlier or later. This would enable the project to detect causal effects of the training – i.e. to understand in a robust manner what the training achieved and what not.
- The project will also assess the feasibility of drawing on and analysing micro workforce data from a range of civil service departments to assess the broader impacts of management and leadership programmes on workforce outcomes (such as performance ratings, promotion trajectories or retention), as important predictors of greater productivity in organizations. This would pave the way for a more strategic use of workforce data to assess the effects of management practices in the Civil Service.

Timeline and Outputs

Survey and participant observation data collection is expected to commence in December2024 (observations) to January 2025 (surveys). All data collection is expected to be completed by October 2025, and final reporting completed by December 2025.

The evaluation will produce a number of outputs:
- A final evaluation report.
- Results presentations, both in the Cabinet Office and in Civil Service departments with large cohorts participating in the training, with tailored (anonymised) results for their departments.
- A guidance note with lessons learned to inform future evaluations of training in government.
- A toolkit to replicate similar curriculum and training structure assessments in other evaluations.

In case of a positive feasibility assessment on workforce data, the project will also produce:
- Methodological guidance for building civil service capacity to use administrative workforce data for future evaluations.
- A training workshop to upskill civil servants in using administrative data to evaluate management practices.

This research plan will be updated once feasibility assessments of the RCT and workforce data analyses are complete.