



Operational Report

The mandatory delivery of ongoing training within the police service of England and Wales and its relationship to the andragogical principle of self-motivation

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1. Executive summary

Adult learning can be a highly rewarding experience for the individual and for organisations. However, it comes with the caveat that learning methods need to be attuned to adult motivations. This study examines the views of police officers towards professional training in general, and compares it with the provision of mandatory NCALT e-learning in particular. The effectiveness of NCALT is found to be poor, owing to a fundamental misalignment with the conditions necessary for adult learning. Recommendations are made with a view to promoting more appropriate methods.

2. Introduction

Police officers require training for various reasons including changes in the law, police procedures, improvements in equipment and because perishable skills need refreshing. Moreover, Chief Officers have a legal duty to provide adequate and relevant training to their employees as failure to do so may lead to failed investigations or, in the most extreme cases loss of life. This in turn can lead to legal action being taken. Much of the training that is provided to officers and staff has been designated as mandatory.

This study utilises two major theories; those of andragogy (adult learning) and of self-determination. Adults see themselves as doers and are real-world orientated. This sees them approach the learning environment seeking an obvious application of the training to their roles and translates into greater self-directedness and motivation than shown by pre-adults. Self-determination theory identifies an important caveat, which is that adults must see value in the training to help them in solving problems.

The National Centre for Applied Learning Technologies (NCALT) was set up to assist the 43 Home Office police forces in England and Wales to deliver training. They now design and develop all e-learning courses on behalf of the College of Policing. The NCALT system primarily consists of 'programmed instruction', where the training is delivered as a one-off course via an electronic device without the presence of an instructor.

Such instruction is flexible, allows for repeated practice and programme delivery is standardised. However, there can be disruption to learning if there are technical issues. The process demands a great deal of self-discipline and the absence of learner support is a major issue.

The main aims of research were:

- to identify to what extent, the generally compulsory nature of training in policing undermines the andragogical principle of self-motivation;

- to examine the extent to which the challenges of police ongoing training delivery are exacerbated by a predominantly e-learning method;
- to consider how the ongoing learning needs of the Police Service of England and Wales can be met in ways which foster andragogical principles.

3. Methodological approach

A large-scale survey was undertaken of members of the Police Service of England and Wales in Federated ranks. This combined a series of questions to measure officers' attitudes towards training, and a list of factors which motivated or demotivated them. The survey had 809 respondents. This was complemented by holding two discussion groups of officers to discuss, triangulate and seek explanations for the findings of the survey. The groups were also able to make recommendations to the service to improve training delivery.

4. Key findings

4.1 98.4% of officers had completed an NCALT e-learning course. The proportion who had completed other forms of training varied between 2.5% for seminar discussion groups without a facilitator, to 53.9% who had taken part in classroom based practical exercises. (809 respondents)

4.2 Answers to individual questions were as follows. Questions have been summarised for the purposes of this paper and are reproduced in full, in the dissertation.

	% Agree	% Disagree	% Neither Agree nor Disagree
It was necessary for ongoing training to be mandatory	56.9	29.4	13.7
Satisfied that ongoing training has met my training needs	20.4	71.2	10.9
Satisfied that e-learning courses have met my training needs	10.9	80.2	8.9
I have been able to use mandatory training in my day to day job	41.0	42.8	16.2
I have been able to use mandatory e-learning in my day to day job	16.1	67.7	16.2
I have felt motivated to take mandatory training	21.8	61.6	16.6
I have felt motivated to complete e-learning	10.3	82.1	7.7

	Necessity of training for job (%)	Interesting course content (%)	Ability to use content in job (%)	Method of training delivery (%)	Increased confidence in job (%)
Increased motivation for general training	75	71	71	56	55
Increased motivation	50	56	51		

for e-learning					
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	Lack of necessity of training for job (%)	Uninteresting course content (%)	Method of training delivery (%)
Decreased motivation for general training	50	68	65
Decreased motivation for e-learning		58	53

4.3 Discussion groups made the following key points.

General ongoing training not meeting learning needs:

- Most training not led by a trainer
- Most training is primarily e-learning
- Most training is a 'waste of time'
- Most training is one-size-fits-all (when one fits all is not appropriate)
- Lack of tailoring courses to roles
- Budget cuts
- More about the organisation's needs than the individual's

Mandatory training:

- It's got to be as you have to know certain things
- Self-preservation / complaint & discipline avoidance
- Officers not self-motivated to develop themselves
- Officers not encouraged to develop themselves
- Pushback from the concept of professionalisation
- Education level may encourage more self-motivation to learn

Improving motivation:

- Give officers a chance to broaden horizons
- End threat of discipline for non-compliance
- The police service is "a professional de-motivator"
- Officers are treated like children
- Focus must be on the usefulness of the training
- Training needs to be reflect what happens in the real world

NCALT e-learning method:

- Can't ask specific questions of a trainer
- Never reinforced by practical input
- Not suitable for learning difficulties e.g. dyslexia
- Learning needs not clear
- It's just a 'tick-box' no learning actually takes place

NCALT and lack of motivation:

- Courses are not relevant to people's job roles
- Links to online discussion groups needed
- It's become a click though as fast as you can culture

- Too much front loading (weary, uninteresting and unengaging)
- Insufficient dedicated time
- Support from supervisors
- Not motivated by discipline
- Should be used as a group training tool
- NCALT 'brand' is now tainted
- Needs to be more fun

Other observations

- Problems accessing the NCALT system
- Can't navigate the NCALT system
- Symptom of wider 'organisational justice' issues
- Lack of trust in the front line by leadership

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 End blanket mandating of individual training courses and the resultant threats of punitive consequences. Place emphasis on providing quality learning experiences rather than count course completions.
- 5.2 Create a course catalogue and recommend courses based on individual job roles.
- 5.3 De-centralise training and restore local training units who are in a better position to tailor training to individuals.
- 5.4 Allow local senior leadership teams and line managers to review catalogues and promote appropriate courses.
- 5.5 Develop "Personal Professional Development" as an integral part of professional practice to encourage officers to seek out training opportunities for their role.
- 5.6 Support the principle of a minimum education level for new joiners.
- 5.7 End 'programmed instruction' courses, and develop e-learning courses as supplemental learning resources for teams.
- 5.8 Redesign the NCALT portal to make it easier to navigate.
- 5.9 All officers to receive 'protected time' in which to undertake courses and utilise this time to use e-learning as a resource for team training activities.