

Pedagogical use of collaborative Professional Discussions for praxis, reflexivity, and communicative action

by Dr Jesvir Kaur Mahil

Context

At Aston University, I am employed as a coach for Level 7 Senior Leader Masters' Degree Apprentices (SLMDAs) (Government, 2017). My role entails preparing SLMDAs to successfully complete a portfolio of evidence that demonstrates praxis (their application of up-to-date management and business knowledge in the workplace) (Rai et al., 2015, Terry, Mahon et al., 2019, Iredale et al., 2013, Trott, 2013) and reflexivity (critical self-reflection on how they are applying skills and professional behaviours in their organisational context) (Grim and Rescher, 2012, Lawson, 1985, Amoureux and Steele, 2016, Mann, 2016, Schiffer, 2020, Serra Undurraga, 2020, Savickas, 2016). 50% of the final SLMDA assessment is a Professional Discussion (lasting 50 to 60 minutes) between an independent assessor and the SLMDA. (UKPSF A3, K1) and the other 50% is a work-based project showcase.

Throughout the apprenticeship, SLMDAs are expected to engage in a variety of work-based learning (illustrated in figure 1 below) including inquiry, discussion and collaboration as explained by Laurillard (2005), (Laurillard, 2009) in her conversational framework paradigm.

Figure 1: Examples of appropriate work-based learning activities expected of SLMDAs



To fully prepare SLMDAs for their summative end point assessment (McCarthy, 2015, Banerjee et al., 2014, Sevens and Nightingale, 2020), I regularly engage in online, recorded Professional Discussions with SLMDAs, which they can listen back to and use as evidence of expected levels of praxis and reflexivity. Adhering to strict ethical guidelines (Zeni, 2001) regarding use of recordings, I share only segments of the recording, for pedagogical purposes, featuring the parts in which the apprentice has contributed. If an apprentice asks me to delete a discussion we have recorded, I do so without challenging their right to make such a request (Traianou, 2014).

In this assignment, my intention is to critically reflect on a systems thinking conceptual approach to incremental rather than radical innovation (Martinich, 2004, Schut et al., 2014, Paula and Edward, 2006) in the context of higher education, complying fully with both internal and external quality assurance regulations, for example the requirement by [Ofqual](#) and (QAA, 2015) for alignment between expectations at every stage of an apprentice's learning journey. (UKPSF K6)

I have used an evidence-informed approach (Briner and Walshe, 2015, Bellamy et al., 2013) to design and implement what I consider to be an innovative approach in the process of using Professional Discussions (PDs) to generate more tangible, beneficial outcomes,

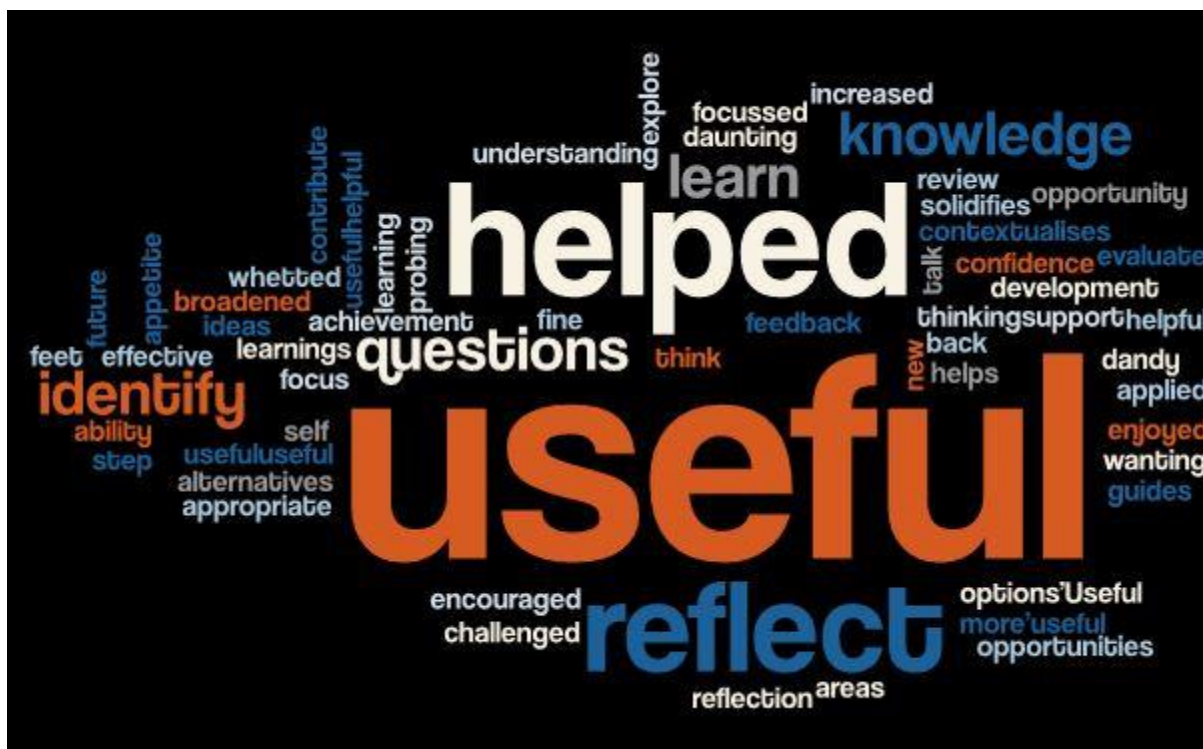
enhancing the quality of learning on the SLMDA programme at Aston University. I will also explain my rationale for evaluating the effectiveness of the research-led innovation (use of collaborative group PDs) in learning and coaching. Finally, I will outline several ways in which I intend to use [public engagement](#) (Commons, 2013, Fort, 2015) for dissemination of my innovation, using a Systems Thinking (Capra and Luisi, 2014, O'Connor and McDermott, 1997, Fitzgerald, 1999) framework. Throughout the assignment, I will make links to the [UKPSF dimensions](#) as listed in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Links between my innovation proposal and UKPSF dimensions

UKPSF Dimension	How the proposed innovation connects to the UKPSF
A1	It describes a learning activity that I have designed and planned. (pages 7-8)
A2	It describes the intended learning outcomes and other benefits of the activity. (page 6)
A3	It explains how the activity aligns with the module's assessment and how learners will gain feedback from the activity. (page 3 and page 8)
A4	It describes how the learners are given guidance and support about the activity. (page 7)
A5	It is a key element of the PGCert in HE and incorporates sound pedagogy, evidence-led scholarship, and reflective evaluation of my professional practice. (page 9, 10 & 14)
K1	It explains how the activity articulates with the subject being taught. (page 3)
K2	It explains why the activity is an appropriate method for the subject and level being taught. (pages 5 & 6)
K3	It explains why the activity is an appropriate method for the learners. (page 7 & 8)
K4	It explains why any learning technologies used were chosen (if applicable). (page 8)
K5	It describes how the innovation will be evaluated, and why the methods chosen are appropriate and feasible. (page 9)
K6	It describes how the innovation articulates with institutional quality assurance processes and how it supports quality enhancement and professional practice. (page 3)
V1	It explains how the innovation supports a diverse cohort and enhances accessibility. (page 7)
V2	It explains how the innovation supports equality of opportunity. (page 7)
V3	The innovation is underpinned by relevant and up-to-date research. (page 14)
V4	It acknowledges relevant aspects of the wider HE context. (page 12)

I identified the need for my proposal to use collaborative Professional Discussions for praxis (pragmatic application of theory in the work place), reflexivity (Bolton, 2009), and communicative action (Habermas, 1997) through an end of term evaluation where I asked approximately 60 apprentices in my caseload for their feedback on the monthly Professional Discussions they had participated in with me during the year. About one third of the apprentices responded to my request for feedback (17 out of 57 apprentices). (See appendix 1)

Figure 1: Student Feedback on the usefulness of Professional Discussions (PDs)



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Currently, PDs are an optional feature of the SLMDA and those who responded were apprentices who had chosen to frequently participate in PDs with me and they clearly valued the positive impact on their learning. Those who did not respond to my request for feedback were predominantly those who had chosen not to engage in optional PDs so their silence does not necessarily indicate a negative impact or lack of value in PDs. Many of those who did not respond to my end of term request for evaluative feedback may have simply been too busy to do so.

As Professional Discussions constitute 50% of the total mark for SLMDA assessments, it was encouraging that at least a third of the apprentices confirmed the benefit of regular PDs during the programme (UKPSF K2). Analysing the responses in more detail, I found that self-reflection was noted as one of the specific benefits of PDs and also the opportunity these provided to discuss application of knowledge in the workplace.

Based on the pragmatic underpinnings for the SLMDA (a desire for greater workplace productivity and societal prosperity), I decided to focus on the concepts of reflexivity and praxis and also the Habermasian notion of ‘communicative action’ (Habermas, 1997) (Flecha et al., 2001) which emphasises sincerity, truth, appropriateness and comprehensive articulation to create meaningful, useful and powerful messages which make an impact in a person’s lifeworld (Habermas, 1997) (Flecha et al., 2001) . This is in contrast to role plays based on fictional scenarios, often used in contemporary classroom-based education, simulating reality without experiential basis. Using PDs as a platform for communicative action, based on dialogues that are sincere, true and articulate, will enable me to provide a space for apprentices that is an incrementally innovative system for stimulating a greater level of praxis and reflexivity. Use of PDs as a pedagogical tool is supported by Soter (2007) who notes that:

“.... we do know (Soter & Rudge, 2005) that the reasoning processes generated through effective small group discussions, when adopted for instructional purposes with clear instructional goals and outcomes, are evident through improved understanding and that this is visible in a measurable way (Chinn & Anderson, 2001; Mercer & Wegeriff, 2002, Nystrand et al, 2003).”

The tangible learning outcome for my innovation proposal, a revised, enhanced and more collaborative process for conducting PDs, is to enable apprentices to achieve higher grades at their End Point Assessment by making a deeper beneficial impact in their workplace

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which serves the interests of all stakeholders, including the communities in which we live and work. (UKPSF A2)

The method of your innovation

PDs are currently an optional feature of the SLMDA course and only around 20 out of 57 apprentices (around a third) choose to participate. I propose to refine the PD process so that it offers an enhanced, more innovative form of collaborative learning (Barkley et al., 2014). (UKPSF K3)

PDs will include the steps illustrated in figure 2 below:

Figure 2: Action plan for implementing innovative use of PDs as a work-based learning strategy



1. Create interest in PDs by sharing positive feedback and testimonials received from previous participants about the benefits of PDs as a pedagogical learning strategy to stimulate praxis, reflexivity and communicative action. Respond to questions arising from this to ensure that all learners are given guidance and support to fully explain the purpose and process entailed in collaborative PDs (UKPSF A4).
2. Enable SLMDA apprentices to form learning triads for online PDs by using software such as Doodle to identify availability. Highlight flexibility, accessibility, and inclusion features of the process so that each apprentice, from a remarkably diverse caseload, is offered an equal opportunity to participate in the PDs with their peers, at a time that is convenient for them. (UKPSF V1, V2)
3. Use flipped learning strategies (Kim and Ahn, 2018) by sharing questions with apprentices ahead of the PD so they can prepare responses in advance, to contribute

to the discussion based on their own application of knowledge in the workplace
(UKPSF K4)

4. Facilitate online spheres for communicative action that is sincere, true and articulate, with fresh questions arising from the PD to stimulate further learning through exploration in the workplace.
5. Apprentices independently complete a reflexivity exercise, in their own time, at their own convenience, following the online group PD. They watch a recording of their personal contribution to the PD and identify actions that may lead to further continuous improvement in their workplace. This is based on research by Nind et al. (2015) demonstrating that “Video stimulated recall is an established method for helping teachers to reflect on their practice (see Moyles, Adams, & Musgrove, 2002; Pirie, 1996; Powell, 2005).” (UKPSF A5)
6. Highlight the importance of clear feedback loops between multiple stakeholders involved in the discussion (peers, coach, employer/mentor) as advocated by Systems Thinking, to consolidate learning via PDs.
7. Provide further learning opportunities through collaborative networking, creating spaces that generate continuous learning and improvement. (UKPSF A1)

The evaluation of your innovation

I will use a combination of three methods to evaluate and measure the impact of my proposed innovation (UKPSF A5, K5) and will explain the suitability of each of these methods below:

1. Focus groups informed by research by Sylvia et al. (2004), (Massey, 2011, Galloway, 2011) who all note the importance of this strategy in evaluations.

I will ask apprentices who have participated in group PDs to discuss the benefits of the PDs and any improvements they would like to see implemented. Two representatives from this discussion (peers) will report back to me with a list of themes arising from the discussion. Asking for a list of themes may increase willingness of participants to share their opinions more openly, with their peers rather than facilitator, protected from ethical challenges (Sim and Waterfield, 2019) such as unwittingly causing offence, or being penalised for their comments, through anonymity and confidentiality. I will use the thematic notes from the focus group discussions to identify relevant actions to improve quality and impact made by PDs.

2. Survey using a questionnaire. This is one of the most common forms of course evaluation in Higher Education (Laupper et al., 2020) and the advantage is that SLMDAs are already familiar with being asked to respond to these. I will ask three simple questions so that apprentices are able to find time in their busy work schedules to respond to:

A: How useful were the group PDs in generating work-based learning for you?

B: What would improve the system and process we used for group PDs?

C: Which forms of work-based learning are more beneficial than PDs for you?

Asking open rather than closed questions (Sema Aşkın and Fatma Zehra, 2017) lends the responses to be analysed through a qualitative approach, for example thematic analyses (Clarke and Braun, 2017, Guest et al., 2012, Nowell et al., 2017) rather than a quantitative, statistical analyses. I have chosen to use thematic analyses so that I may interpret the responses I receive in context, using a Systems Thinking perspective, taking into account a diverse range of stakeholders.

3. Individual verbal feedback from apprentices, actively used in planning future sessions.

Traditionally, teachers and coaches are expected to give developmental feedback to their students and apprentices (Robert et al., 2020). In contrast, my third evaluation method is a request for regular, ongoing feedback from my apprentices so that I may continue to develop the structure and process of PDs to make a deep impact on work-based learning. During each individual coaching

session, I allow apprentices to provide me with feedback by asking them to collaborate with me to plan the next coaching session and also to share their ideas about how the group PDs are going. Apprentices feel motivated to share their opinions with me as their involvement creates a noticeable and desirable impact for them (The World et al., 2016). (UKPSF A5)

The dissemination of your innovation

To communicate the rationale, method and impact of my proposed innovation (pedagogical use of collaborative Professional Discussions for praxis, reflexivity and communicative action) I will engage in the following methods of Public Engagement:

1. Use professional social media platforms such as Yammer to share the article I have written about this research-based innovation to invite comments from colleagues and apprentices. Recent research, for example Men and Tsai (2013), (Agostino and Arnaboldi, 2016) and (Besley, 2010) demonstrates the increasing importance of social media in changing perceptions and transforming culture, so I anticipate that social media will enable me to engage in multidirectional communication that will have an impact on my future research based initiatives.
2. Present a paper at an Education Conference at other Universities and use the opportunity to share my thoughts, ideas and learning strategies with enthusiastic research based educators. Transparency is an important feature of public engagement (Pind Aradóttir and Hjálmarsson, 2018) so I will highlight both success and mistakes I have made in using PDs so that peers may save some time in avoiding these.
3. Create a YouTube webinar about my PD innovation and invite comments from an international audience. I have a YouTube channel which I have already used to successfully disseminate previous research, leading to annual online conferences which I host regularly, using Professional Discussions as a pedagogical tool on the subjects of [creativity, leaderships and culture](#).
4. Create a poster about the importance of PDs as a learning strategy that could be used during SLMDA inductions, summarising various strategies for work-based learning, such as PDs, networking and critical self-reflection.
5. Advocate the broader use of PDs as a learning tool through staff development workshops offered by the Education Team at Aston University. Researchers such as Yu and Gayazova (2013) remind us of the important role played by PDs in development of the art and craft of teaching. By sharing transparent evaluations of my use of PDs as part of the SLMDA programme, I anticipate

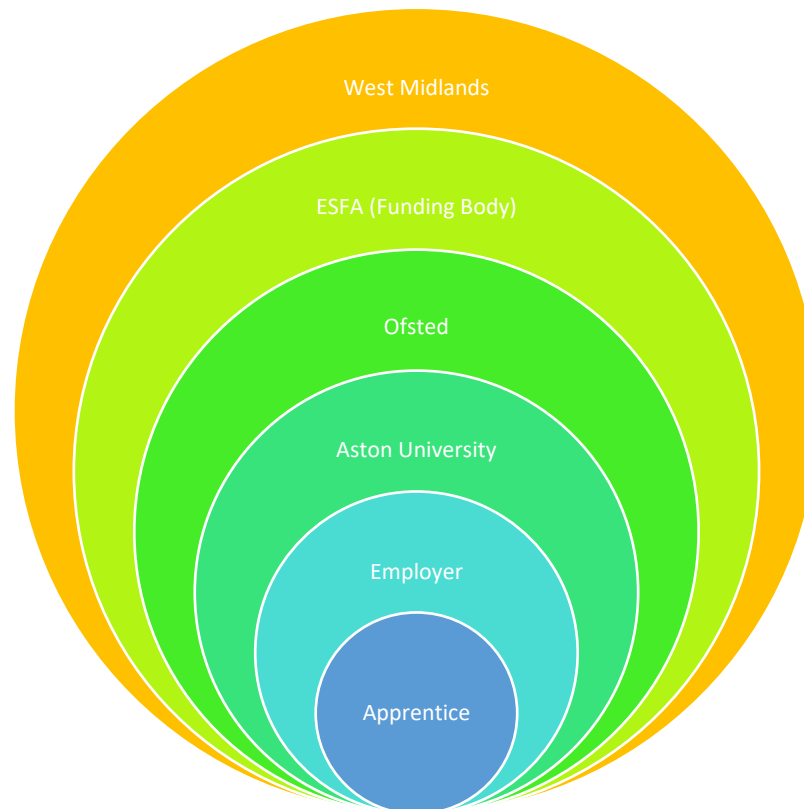
that the systematic process I advocate will have transferable application to a wide range of staff development programmes across Aston University.

Conclusion

I have used an incremental rather than a radical approach in my proposal for a strategic innovation in the way in which we currently prepare SLMDA apprentices for their final assessment, which includes a Professional Discussion constituting 50% of their overall mark. This innovation was piloted earlier this year and received positive feedback from 17 apprentices in my caseload of 57. I have incorporated the comments made by apprentices who have already experienced my method of facilitating PDs (see Appendix 1), to create a much more structured and systematic design with appropriate feedback loops to record evidence of praxis, reflexivity and communicative action in a form that will constitute robust and rigorous evidence of applied knowledge in the workplace, to gain accreditation as a Level 7 Senior Leader qualification.

Reflexivity can be risky when it entails challenging positionality, team dynamics and organisational culture. Therefore, my proposal for PDs is designed to be used with peers rather than employers of apprentices, to avoid potential embarrassment when sensitive issues are discussed in public, such as the organisation's pay gaps or inequities apparent in the hierarchical structure. Based on feedback I have already received, I will modify and further develop the process and structure of PDs to focus on facilitating collaborative learning stimulated by communicative action through discussions between employer and apprentice which may lead to decisions that have a broader impact on the communities in which we live and work and the diverse range of stakeholders with a keen interest in the success of SLMDA programmes as illustrated in Figure 3 below: (UKPSF V4)

Figure 3: (UKPSF V4) Stakeholders with power and interest in SLMDA programmes



My proposal to use PDs as a pedagogical strategy for learning through collaboration, praxis, reflexivity, and communicative action is innovative as it breaks away from traditional classroom discourse patterns as noted by Soter (2007: 9):

“We know from studies of classroom discourse patterns (Cazden, 2001; Nystrand et al. 1997; Barnes, 1978) that traditional classrooms are most often exemplified in the I-R-E pattern of communication (i.e, Initiation (mostly teacher), Response (mostly student), Evaluation (mostly teacher))

Using Systems Thinking and public engagement as an integral aspect of the PD process, I aim to advocate work-based learning where the apprentice takes a much more predominant role in initiating and evaluating the quality of their own learning through Professional Discussions, compared with the traditional classroom-based approach where their main involvement occurs as a response rather than initiation or evaluation.

(word count = 2,754)

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(UKPSF A5, V3)

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Appendix 1 (UKPSF A2, K3, V1)

Usefulness of Professional Discussions

Question 1: How useful has it been for you to engage in online SLMDA Professional Discussions (PDs)?			
Response	Initials	Comment	Follow up
1	AC	it has been extremely useful and has got me thinking about my role in my business and how I can support my team in a similar manner	Encourage PDs in workplace
2	CW	It was a little daunting at first, as I am not used to being recorded. After the initial nerves, I found this to be a handy tool for discussing my knowledge, understanding and experiences that I have learned on the SLMDA	
3	DO	<p>I have found it useful to have dedicated sessions to understand the specific assessment criteria in more detail for each element of the SLMDA. Without this there have been at least a couple of occasions where I wasn't sure about what the criteria was asking for (e.g. the difference between "Know and Understand" and "Demonstrate", also specifically Systems Thinking). Developing my understanding of the latter has been incredibly useful in the workplace.</p> <p>It has been particularly useful to discuss ideas for my evidence and develop them into the final product.</p> <p>Without the discussions I would have found it more difficult and arguably the quality of evidence may not have been as high (for example, as my engagement and understanding of the process increased around the 3rd session, I was able to revisit the work that I had previously submitted and improve it).</p> <p>I have found that as the MBA programme has progressed, I have found the discussions more useful so the relationship development is really important to the process.</p> <p>It has been useful for me to bring my manager into the process and has helped to instil confidence that my learning can be applied into the workplace.</p>	<p>Encourage iterative improvements in evidence</p> <p>Include managers in PDs</p>
4	DB	I have found the professional discussions a very useful process when it comes to supporting my learning activity. I feel this is because I am a reflective learner myself so it	Use PDs to stimulate reflection and reward achievements, progress made.

		helps to bring into touch some of the work that I have been participating in and demonstrates a sense of achievement throughout the process. It also provides a platform for direct feedback. I find that this form is the most effective as it allows questions to be asked both ways.	Provide direct and spontaneous feedback. Stimulate meaningful Q&As
5	EJ	I have enjoyed the format Jesvir recently adopted which made me think on my feet and discuss certain issues and experiences in work. The additional questions, probing for more information and examples of applied learning, really helped me a knowledge developmental milestones.	Encourage apprentices to think on their feet and respond to questions spontaneously. Ask probing questions to encourage application of knowledge. Set developmental milestones
6	GO	I preferred the professional discussions which were planned in advance so I had a chance to prep. The ones that were completed as part of the QPR I didn't feel added much value.	Set questions in advance so that apprentice can prepare for the PDs
7	JR	Very useful – it helped to focus on what needs to be done next	Support the apprentices to gain clarity about what needs to be done next
8	JC	I've found the process very useful. It contextualises the learnings from the MBA and solidifies my understanding of the business I work in.	Use PDs to contextualise learning from the MBA. Consolidate application of learning in business
9	MC	I found the professional discussions very useful and found in the later parts of my study i realised how it had started to synergise with the other develop techniques and tools. The professional discussions prompted good discussions and questions and often I left these sessions wanting to learn more or explore new ideas or alternatives that I had not considered adding to my experiences and future options/skill set.	Inspire apprentices to want to learn more or explore new ideas or alternatives not previously considered.
10	MM	Useful in terms of a test of knowledge and quickly guides if I'm thinking the correct area/level of detail as the SLMDA appears to be broad but light. I'd feel more comfortable if it could be structured as a bit more of a polished presentation by powerpoint. I struggled for instance on the topic of Finance (which I should know very well) to provide a general discussion on financial strategies and	Probe more deeply into what is of specific importance and relevance to the interests and context in which the apprentice is working.

		modelling, when my more recent reading on Finance would be what is in the Finance Act 2020 and on the technical transactional effects of COVID furlough/debts/rent holiday/impairment accounting under UK GAAP, IFRS, FRS102, FRED76.	
11	MO	The online approach has been fine and I have seen no reason to need a face to face meeting to achieve the same.	
12	MT	It has been extremely useful to engage in professional discussions.	
13	MW	I have found this very helpful. It has kept me focussed during the year and ensured that I have been prepared for the reviews. It has encouraged me to review my previous work and the ability to talk it through has increased my knowledge of my own organisation and also the wider world. We can become very insular when we have worked for an organisation for 22 years like I have, so to look at the automotive world in general and talk about things such as 'horizon scanning' has broadened my knowledge and wetted my appetite to learn more. Being able to talk about strategies, a VUCA world, Porters Five Forces, Risk Analysis Matrices, SWOT and TOWS is not something I would have believed in myself 2 years ago.	Encourage apprentices to prepare for a PD in the QPR session. Encourage apprentices to discuss theories they have learnt on the MBA.
14	MB	I have found the discussions very useful at the start of the process I was not clear on how they could be used in the most effective way but this has developed after a few sessions. The discussions enable me to reflect on the modules I am completing and how they link to competencies.	Encourage apprentices to reflect on modules completed and discuss how these modules link to the SLMDA competencies.
15	NC	I have found the professional discussions really useful – they have challenged me to reflect in more detail on my day to day work and the application of my learning, and have helped me to identify more opportunities to either apply my learning or recognise where my learning has helped me deal with situations I face in the work place.	Challenge apprentices to reflect in more detail on day to day work and application of learning. Support apprentices to apply learning or recognise where learning has already helped in dealing with situations faced in the work place.
16	PC	The professional discussions have been very helpful, I just wish I had made more of the opportunity. They made me step	Support apprentices to apply knowledge and make changes

		back, reflect and evaluate how I was approaching my everyday work. It is very easy to attend the lectures and study weekends throughout the year and then revert back to your own way of working due to time pressures, etc.	instead of reverting back to comfortable ways of working.
17	RH	It has been extremely useful for a number of reasons. The professional discussions have helped me to isolate and identify areas of my on the job learning that directly feed into the SLMDA criteria. They give an appropriate space for self-reflection which is often hard to find with such a busy day job. They also contribute to my own professional development through allowing me the time and space to reflect on my professional behaviours and objectives.	Support apprentices to isolate and identify areas of their job that directly link to the SLMDA criteria. Support apprentices to reflect on professional behaviours and objectives.

Table 2: Ways to improve Professional Discussions

Question 2: How could we improve the use of Professional Discussions to stimulate learning and encourage application of knowledge in the workplace?			Follow up actions
1	AC	people work in varied environments. Slmda mentors could visit people in the work place and see in action. Give ideas to improve and implementation	Use technology for “online visits” into workplace. le seeing the workplace context in addition to the apprentice.
2	CW	Would be useful for the workplace mentors or line managers to be committed to the professional discussions, so that we (the apprentices) get to practice and record these with our businesses. Perhaps it should be linked to SMLDA funding.	Gain commitment from employers/managers/mentors to participate actively in PDs
3	DO	There could be a greater focus on the ability to demonstrate all aspects of the learning to the workplace and move away from just knowing/understanding the criteria. Bringing the candidates manager in to the process is incredibly worthwhile in my experience, so being able to sell the benefit to the candidates employer is really important. I have been fortunate in my position within the business and with my manager’s support that I have been able to implement my learning within the course and the SLMDA.	Encourage employers to actively participate in the PDs

4	DB	I think perhaps the discussion forms could be a more a digitalised system. I'm not sure whether or not Skills Forward would have the capability to file Professional discussion feedback and follow up actions.	Provide PD feedback & follow up actions digitally
5	EJ	I think the interview format works very well and helps reflective learning. Since March 2020 my organisation has invested more in the development of Office 365 and I think the Apps we have produced could be useful tool to help log learning quickly when 'on the go'. I have found this year hard with multiple time demands, and an easier interface to log information would be useful.	Encourage apprentices to log information digitally using Apps
6	GO	Consider watching or reading something before embarking on the professional discussions. It could be a Ted Talk, a webinar etc and then engage a conversation with small groups to discuss the subject and how that could resonate in their workplace. It would be more engaging and relevant.	Facilitate thematic PDs using Ted Talks, webinars to stimulate the discussion

7	JR	I think the professional discussions are good – but they are quite generic and less specific based - which is understandable – I think the professional discussions should help to make sense of how everything fits together across the whole of your programmes – sometimes it feels as though I am repeating myself ... at other times it feels as though the assignments done are not recognised	Use PDs to create a space for synthesising knowledge from across the programme
8	JC	I think some practical suggestions of ways of developing in skills and understanding, based on other students' experiences & SLMDA journeys would be useful. I think initially it's quite challenging to understand how to both theoretically and practically develop and apply knowledge in the workplace. Having some initial ideas, suggestions and discussions around different options would help to spark ideas.	Use previous students' experiences of successfully completing journey Provide initial ideas, suggestions & discussions around different options to spark ideas.

9	MC	I personally feel the way the Professional Discussions were conducted and ran were very good and I would struggle to offer improvements. I like the fact these have been done in conjunction with my learning and evidence portfolio and this has made it more relatable to work. I also liked doing the Professional Discussions not only with my SLMDA coach but also alternating with my coach/manager in the work environment – this for me gave a good blend of academic discussion but also work place discussions and I feel we managed to apply academic theory to my work place and involve my manager as well which helped the overall process.	Encourage apprentices to engage in PDs in the workplace with their managers
10	MM	The Professional Discussion with Purbani and Debbie on 24/01/2020 worked well. Advanced notice, preparation on one single topic (one which had just been studied), and different organisations to my own which then prompted further ideas. When studying a subject like Strategy I'm thinking of the application of the literature so Professional Discussions following the course schedule rather than months later would be helpful	Organise group PDs to follow on from MBA modules completed, with groups of apprentices, with an opportunity to prepare for response to a question

11	MO	If there was less time on the bureaucratic elements, evidence and paperwork then that time could be used on things that would add value. I have found the encouragement to use different media useful, e.g. recording short vlogs.	Encourage apprentices to keep electronic diaries and vlogs
12	MT	Having a wide database of questions that could be used, with more than one possible question per competency for the SLMDA would be more useful I feel. It was interesting to hear other students answers on Zoom calls. Having sample recorded discussions for students to view in their own time would likely foster greater engagement once they can see how useful they can be.	<p>Create a wide database of questions</p> <p>Create opps for group PDs</p> <p>Provide sample recorded discussions to demonstrate how useful they can be</p>
13	MW	From a personal point of view there is nothing I could say would improve it. I have enjoyed them, they have helped me so far and I believe they will help me when the end point assessment comes along. There is nothing else I could add here as this has been a very rewarding experience for me.	Use PDs to prepare apprentices for End Point Assessment plan
14	MB	I think the use of the feedback form and follow up at the discussions would support this, with a particular link to the module being studied and how this relates to the workplace and competencies.	<p>Use the feedback form to follow up on the discussions</p> <p>Link to the module being studied and application in the workplace and to the SLMDA competencies</p>

15	NC	I would suggest that it would be useful to have a professional discussion at the end of each academic module which challenges students to identify how they are going to apply the learning from the module, and then use this to form the basis of an ongoing discussion.	Organise PDs at the end of each academic module to challenge apprentices to identify how they are going to apply the learning in the workplace
16	PC	I can only speak for myself and this may sound weak but due to my busy schedule and my extra commitments outside of work it was easy for me to fall behind and miss appointments. Only later to realise how worthwhile they are. Students may feel overwhelmed at the start of the course but I would look at monthly meetings with 10 mins of professional discussions (maybe just 2-3 questions) and then 5-10 mins of support for current learning activities. I would also track these meetings and have a percentage completion requirement.	Organise coaching session to include 10 minutes of PD (2 to 3 questions)
17	RH	I think it would be good to raise awareness of what a Professional Discussion is and how it can be used as a key part of the apprenticeship with the line managers of apprentices. They do not tend to be common practice where I currently work and that can act as a barrier to requesting one with senior managers.	<p>Raise awareness of what a PD is and how it can be used as a key component of the apprenticeship with line managers.</p> <p>Ask line managers/mentors to regularly engage in PDs with apprentices</p>

Table 3: Most effective work-based learning strategies

Question 3: Which work-based learning strategy has worked for you most effectively in completing your SLMDA? (e.g. self-reflection, journaling, mentoring, coaching, networking, Professional Discussions, training, reading, listening to webinars & podcasts). Please explain why and how.			
1	AC	self reflections, mentoring and coaching others to perform better and efficiently in a collaborative style. We are always learning and reflecting on past experiences helps us to hopefully better manage the future if exposed to similar conditions.	self reflections, mentoring coaching
2	CW	Towards the end of the programme, I found a workplace Mentor that was beneficial for me. They understood the workplace environment and helped me to structure my time and learning and was on hand to give advice and discuss any concerns that I had. This should also be a mandated part of the funding requirement, as I would have benefited from this resource from the beginning of the apprenticeship.	Mentor: They understand the workplace; can help time management, give advice & discuss concerns
3	DO	Self-reflection is huge, training yourself to be able to critique a situation in as un-biased way as possible has enable a step-change in my development. I have always reflected but I would say in a more negative critical/over-obsessive way before whereas now I am able to reflect on what went well, not-so-well and use my toolkit to analyse why and come up with strategies for doing it differently for the future.	Critical self-reflection (what is going well & what is not going so well & why not? & strategies for doing things differently going forward
4	DB	Self-Reflection is the most effective learning method for me. I find it best to analyse my actual experiences it makes it easier for me to form judgement.	Self-reflection: analyse & evaluate own experiences
5	EJ	I am a big fan of reading, using webinars and self-reflection in advance when the lectures are interactive and scenario based as the effort is clearly rewarded. This provides a great platform to apply learning and helps me much more professionally. The Operations, Systems and Processes and Finance modules were great examples of how relatively dry subject matter can come to life and as a	Reading Webinars Self-reflection Interactive, scenario-based lectures where the learning can be applied to the workplace

		<p>result it has been clearly applied in my work.</p> <p>I found the organisational behaviour much more difficult. Despite being dotted with guest speakers, a study day with group sessions and more, we never really focused the learning into a learning activity. As a result I found this more difficult to engage with.</p> <p>In summary, if the module is delivered well (very subjective I know) and suits my learning style I am likely to engage well with the material, in whatever format it is provided.</p>	
6	GO	<p>All of the above have played a role in supporting the SLMDA. The self-reflection and journaling have been most useful this year to reflect on the changing climate and what I have done to adapt leadership behaviours to support our strategy and my team.</p> <p>Mentoring/coaching through work has been least useful as they haven't really understand what the objective of the SLMDA has been about and how they could support me.</p>	Self-reflection journaling
7	JR	<p>Self Reflection – when I get the opportunity to reflect it is helpful to be able to look at behaviours and where I can demonstrate – this gets increasingly hard the longer you have worked within a Senior Role – and mind has been for 10 years – but it does help in helping me recognise how much I do and have done for and with the business</p> <p>/Professional Discussions – These have helped focus – but it has been challenging trying to protect the time.</p> <p>Training/Conference/RSA – provides information that I can upload – this is helpful - but podcasts have helped and completing the assignments has really helped and whilst not yet uploaded – looking at the RSA evening event that I recently attended as one of their 30,000 fellows enabled me to use the 'collective genius model' Linda Hill in that discussion when we were looking at how we can create new ideas within work spaces regarding COVID and its impact and what that</p>	Self-reflection Professional Discussions Training Conferences Podcasts

		has meant for workplaces/communities and how we can collectively respond to that	
8	JC	Online professional discussions have helped both contextualise the SLMDA and to solidify my understanding of the various key competencies and how they apply across the business. The reason for this is that self reflection in the context of professional development can be quite challenging without some prompting and guidance. Having someone to bounce ideas off and get a different perspective is really helpful.	Professional Discussions
9	MC	For me personally reflection has been the foundation of my development since I started the MBA but I would now place , reflection, coaching and Professional Discussions to be the most effective learning tools and I am finding they are completing each other. I am not saying the other methods are not working or adding value I just feel at this stage in my development I am finding these three techniques the most effective at this point in time.	Self reflection Coaching Professional Discussions
10	MM	Reading – A reading list to accompany the SLMDA would be helpful Journaling – I tend to keep other docs eg plans, checklists, action lists, minutes Coaching/Mentoring – The intention was to organise mentoring but we never prioritised arranging it with the volatile business environment. My line manager has been providing some coaching. Networking – Yes I have had to consult with colleagues to understand how the organisation operates in some areas Webinars – CIMA provide quite a lot (especially during lockdown) some eg strategy have been useful to the SLMDA Professional Discussions – As above Self-Reflection – The bulk of the SLMDA completed so far Work-based learning in general over the last 12 months has been a little unstructured	Reading (create a reading list to accompany the SLMDA) Journaling Coaching Mentoring Networking (internal & external to organisation) Webinars Self-reflection
11	MO	. I have listened to a lot of podcasts and then explored further based on hearing them. I have also found significant benefit in reading books both on the core	Podcasts Reading

		of the learning but also those that may be considered more peripheral.	
12	MT	In truth I don't believe there has been a singular strategy that has proved most effective but those I have gained the most from have been the Professional Discussions, watching webinars and my own personal reading. For professional discussions the "why" is that these "force" you to think about the competencies and formulate good answers. The webinars and reading are choices that you make as the learner and so you effectively choose a topic you have an interest in - admittedly this strategy will not work for everyone if you find very little of interest to want to learn about!	Professional Discussions Webinars Reading
13	MW	With regards to the work-based learning strategy I firmly believe that it is a combination of all of the areas described below. There has been lots of self-reflection – am I good enough to do this, am I able to give a good account of myself and will I get enough quality time to be able to keep up – these were not negative thoughts but just something that resonated with me as it has been a long time since I finished my degree (way back in 1994). Making time for working on the MBA modules or on the Aston Edge work will always be a challenge but we do have to make time for ourselves and this was definitely a learning curve in the early days. There has been lots of journaling and note making/taking, great support from my mentor at work and also the Plant director who has ensured I have had the support needed to get this far and thus on the road to completion. The regular meeting with the SLMDA coach has been informative, supportive and demanding, ensuring my portfolio currently looks strong and is near completion. Listening to webinars, podcast and things such as Ted Talks has given me greater knowledge about the business world. Meeting people from different businesses and back grounds has given me a greater network and with this comes great building and bonding and friends for life. All in all a really positive experience for me and one that I would recommend.	Self-reflection Journaling Note-making/taking Mentor Coaching (informative, supportive, demanding) Webinars Podcasts Ted Talks Network

et	MB	<p>Professional discussions with Coach and reflections.</p> <p>I continually reflect on my work however the discussions have developed me in terms of thinking from a wider systems perspective. Using some of the tools that have been explored have also supported in this, for example, PESTLE, SWOT and Kotter's 8 step model</p>	<p>Professional Discussions</p> <p>Reflection</p> <p>Experimenting with tools learned on MBA course</p>
15	NC	<p>I think coaching and professional discussions have been most helpful to me, mainly due to having someone else's input and challenge to stimulate my own reflection, I find other methods whilst informative and helpful don't challenge me as much to reflect and unpick my own performance and approach</p>	<p>Coaching</p> <p>Professional Discussions</p> <p>Reflection</p>
16	PC	<p>I think I have taken something from everything I have done since being on the course. The study weekends took me out of my comfort zone and have strengthened my networking skills and also working with people outside of my everyday circle. My Plant Manager has said on numerous occasions and discussed it with others about the progression and confidence I have gained over the last 2 years. The self-reflection has had the biggest impact on both my work life and my personal life. I have always worked at 100mph and filled my day to the point of being exhausted by the time I went to bed and not having a minute to sit down. As part of my reflecting I could see that I was not working smart, I had no structure to what I was trying to do and only trying to fill my day to justify my efforts.</p>	<p>Networking (internal and external to organisation)</p> <p>Self-reflection (working smarter rather than harder)</p>
17	RH	<p>I have found a mixture of work-based learning strategies to be most effective in completing the SLMDA. Self-reflection has been particularly useful, as has journaling key events and activities which then helps me to realise the relevance to the SLMDA.</p>	<p>Self-reflection</p> <p>Journaling</p>