Centralising Learning and Development within the UK Office for National Statistics
A case study on the challenges faced
Centralising Learning and Development – Part one

• 2011 – founding of Civil Service Learning
• Impact on ‘trainers’ in the government offices
• Centralising access to learning
• Controlling spend
• Consistency of messages
Centralising Learning and Development – Part one

Removing traditional structures

Diagram:
- Head of Learning and Development
- Administrative support
- Trainers
Centralising Learning and Development – Part two

• The lasting impact of the economic downturn on learning
• Reviewing the purpose of learning in a post recession era
• Optimising organisational structures
Centralising Learning and Development – Part two

Optimising organisational structures

- Org Strategy
- Org Capability
- People Competencies
- Execution Methods
Centralising Learning and Development – Part two

- Org Strategy

- A Vision
- A purpose
- A value proposition
- Clear priorities
- Dedicated financial resources
Centralising Learning and Development – Part two

- Org Capability

- Alignment with the business
- The right structures
- Excellent processes
- The right technology
- Quality monitoring
- Financial planning and demand management
Centralising Learning and Development – Part two

- People Competencies

- Business acumen
- Performance improvement
- Management projects
- Enabling change
- Learning methods and design
Centralising Learning and Development – Part two

• Execution Methods

• Quality assurance
• Social and informal learning
• Design
• Programming and prioritisation
• Technical developments
• Facilitation and delivery
Centralising Learning and Development – Part three

Large organisations love decentralised learning…

- Subject matter experts ensure knowledge is held in teams
- Control over outputs and results
- Quick to respond and flexible to adapt
- Closeness to target audience to witness impact
- Bespoke learning to build trusted relationships
Centralising Learning and Development – Part three

When decentralised structures fail to meet the mark:

• Inconsistencies in design and delivery
• Collaboration is difficult because of silo working
• Parochial attitudes mean learning is for some, not all
• Skills and progression are limited by the environment
• Duplication occurs
• Learners are not exposed to the ‘big picture’
• Local trainers ‘go native’
Centralising Learning and Development – Part four

The ONS ‘decision’ – was centralising the right option?

Objectives

• To understand and organise common skill requirements so that there was an overview of the whole strategic demand

• To control learning and development costs for the benefit of the whole organisation

• To align the learning and development strategy with business goals
Centralising Learning and Development – Part four

Meeting objective one:
To understand and organise common skill requirements so that there was an overview of the whole strategic demand

- Physically drawing teams together facilitates a single approach to professional competence
- It’s easier to share resources and prioritise
- L&D staff are easier to cross train
- Centralised L&D career pathways and professional progression
- Consistency in delivery approach
- Encourages specialisms within the team for design and commissioning v design and delivery
- Professionalises the function
Centralising Learning and Development – Part four

Meeting objective two:
To control learning and development costs for the benefit of the whole organisation

• Controllable budgets for the benefit of the whole organisation
• Reducing duplication for better management of public money
• Ownership of commissioning learning
Centralising Learning and Development – Part four

Meeting objective three:
To align the learning and development strategy with business goals
  • Driven by business strategy
Centralising Learning and Development – Part four

What did ONS do?

Created ‘The Learning Academy’ using:

- A statistical learning team from within Statistical Methodology
- A leadership and management function from within HR
- A workforce essentials team from various sources across the business
Centralising Learning and Development – Part four

The challenges:

- A lack of clear vision of team’s purpose and priorities
- Roles, responsibilities and processes were unclear
- Some departments retained their L&D units
- Some departments released staff but retained experts
- Some passed L&D requirements to support functions with no L&D understanding
Centralising Learning and Development – Part four

Impact:
• An unclear relationship between The Learning Academy and the business
• Skill ‘grabbing’ meant required expertise was not available
• High expectations on a team with limited experience and resources = disappointment
• ‘storming’ showed no sign of settling down; high sickness rates and attrition
Centralising Learning and Development – Part four

Finding solutions:

- An organisation wide learning needs analysis built from existing strategy documents and business plans
- A directory of learning
- A management pathway programme
- A team review that led to a single customer relationship process and a new support team
- A learning and development strategy aligned to business needs
- An increased corporate L&D budget
- A team performing at an acceptable level
Centralising Learning and Development – Part five

The immediate demand v supply issue:

- Upskilling and developing the multiple professions within ONS and the analytical professions across government
- Building a cadre of capable and competent leaders with a sustainable talent pool
- Supporting the transformation agenda through specific skill and knowledge attainment by focusing on digital capability
- Ensuring compliance with regulation and policy in line with best practice models
- Addressing issues such as long term sickness absences associated with mental health conditions (the largest single cause of sickness absence)
- Building digital and data science capability
Centralising Learning and Development – Part five

Is centralised learning the only solution to achieve optimum organisational effectiveness?

• Departments with their own L&D functions will argue that only they are able to respond quickly and effectively to business demands unlike a centralised team
• The centralised team is only focused on ‘big picture’ issues which don’t relate to their subject matter expertise
Centralised Learning and Development – Part five

The federated training organisation model

Leadership

Central L&D Function

Team L&D  Team L&D  Team L&D
Centralised Learning and Development – Part five

Strong collaborative relationships:
• A clear understanding of roles and responsibilities of all parties
• Robust evaluation procedures that stay within strict, common parameters to ensure consistency of data
• Excellent and frequent communication channels in order to prevent duplication and to share information
• Mutual respect of professional skills and requirements
Centralised Learning and Development – next steps

Does the Learning Academy grow to absorb team L&D functions?

Does ONS adopt a federated model and use new systems and processes to unite L&D?
Centralising Learning and Development - questions