

Participation, Justice and Trust within Developmental Peer Observation of Teaching: a Model and Research Agenda

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Abstract

Peer observation of teaching (POT) within Higher Education (HE) has become established practice, purporting to serve the function of continuing professional development (CPD) and, as a potential consequence, teaching quality. Nevertheless, there are tensions within this as political drivers for quality interact with lecturers' learning and development. Drawing upon literatures from both the disciplines of management and education, a model is proposed to illustrate a route through the various elements of the POT process within CPD initiatives. The relationships between individuals, their peers and their employing institution require consideration at the theoretical level, including issues of employee participation (and its associated organisational politics), organisational justice and trust (and their associated power relationships), as all have implications for management and lecturers alike within the development and implementation of POT initiatives. Although the taxonomy proposed is positivist in overall stance, it requires the social phenomena observed and their meanings to be subject to interpretation at the component level. The article aims to provide a framework for future research into developmental POT, providing a bridge between management education and peer observation practice, outlining some suggested areas which are currently under-researched but are of significance in understanding the potential for developmental initiatives for lecturing staff. A research agenda is proposed based upon published research but suggesting a new focus drawing upon notions of participation, justice and trust.

Key words: Peer observation, continuing professional development (CPD), employee participation, organisational justice, trust.

Introduction

Peer observation of teaching (POT) has been described as a part of the overall professional development process of teaching staff (Fullerton 1993). Much research has been carried out in the schools sector into teachers' professional development via peer observation, although this is a relatively new field within universities (Shortland 2004a). It is, however, gaining in importance as increasing emphasis is placed on the quality of students' experiences in learning and on lecturing staff as reflective practitioners (Hodgkinson 2003). Loughran and Gunstone (1997) suggest that a number of factors need to be in place if a professional development programme using peer observation as a development tool is to be successful. These include the initiatives' being capable of responding to individual needs, being respectful of individuals' independence, promoting genuine respect for thoughts and ideas as well as being challenging to the participants whilst having a clear sense of purpose. Although Hodgkinson (2003) suggests that peer observation 'cannot replace the broader learning that takes place on teacher training programmes' (p.16), it has significant applicability to lecturing staff in HE pursuing continuing professional development (CPD) by enabling them to take control of their own learning and development, through ongoing reflection and action (Meggison & Whitaker 2003), within the context of life-long learning (Nicholls 2000).

Partington (1999) suggests that academic staff are obligated to remain at the forefront of their discipline and so

CPD has always been an integral part of their role in respect of scholarship and research. However, teaching and management competencies have been imposed upon academic staff, particularly since the early 1990s, through politically driven processes (*op. cit.*). Roberts, Anderson, Betts and Oakley (2002) consider performance to include academic enterprise and administration and thus competencies in these are expected in addition to those within teaching and research. It can be argued therefore that CPD now extends into these domains as well as academic subject areas, although the extent to which lecturers engage in CPD remains, for some, a personal choice. It is encouraged by the HE Academy (2007), yet within some subject disciplines CPD and associated record keeping has become mandatory. For example, human resource management taught under the auspices of the professional body, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, requires lecturers to practise CPD and record both their learning and their development plans (Meggison & Whitaker 2003). The rationale for this is that it is no longer possible to use learning gained early in a career and rely on it throughout our working lives. 'Professional learning' has a 'sell-by date' and our assets in this regard diminish unless they are repeatedly refreshed (*op. cit.* p.7).

Within industry, the concept of the learning organisation as one in which people's ideas and behaviour are not subordinated to corporate strategy and centrally defined procedures, but rather where learning acts as a process element to link ideas, policy, operations and action (Senge 1990) has yet to be fully embraced (Reid,

Barrington & Brown 2004). Nevertheless, organisations that are regarded as exhibiting high performance engage in practices that promote human resource development (HRD) via a number of means including initiatives to promote ongoing learning and the sharing of subsequent knowledge (Leary-Joyce 2004). Megginson and Whitaker (2003) suggest that CPD can be used as a strategy within this by giving 'power and focus to a range of HRD interventions' (p.6).

POT provides a mechanism for development within HE, although its contested nature as a managerial device to measure 'quality' and as part of performance appraisals cannot be denied (Shortland, 2004a). Nevertheless, the developmental focus of POT within the HE sector is highlighted by the lecturers' union, The University and College Union (UCU, formerly NATFHE), in its definition of what constitutes peer observation, calling it 'a process whereby a third party observes, and provides feedback on, teaching and learning support taking place in a university or college. Its purposes are to strengthen and enhance the quality of teaching and learning by providing feedback to the staff involved, to provide opportunities for staff to learn from each other, and to assist with staff development. The first guiding principle of observation should be that it is *developmental* rather than *judgmental*' (NATFHE 2001, p.2, emphasis added). NATFHE (*op. cit.*) draws a distinction between peer observation as part of capability (to which it is opposed) and development and argues that the feedback from the observation process 'should primarily be owned by the observee' (p.4).

Peer observation is therefore not supported as part of performance appraisal, for example, as part of a '360 degree' subordinate/peer/manager performance measurement or compensation determination arrangement (Armstrong & Baron 2005). Performance appraisal typically aims to assess current - and improve future - performance usually through identification of training needs, future potential and pay although, as Reid *et al.* (2004) note, it is unwise for all three objectives to be attempted together. Peer observation within universities is typically linked to short-term training objectives only (Shortland 2004a), although development opportunities can be harnessed by the individuals themselves (Shortland 2004b).

Various tensions exist between the aims of POT and it can be seen to have both strategic and operational properties. For example, POT is frequently used as part of monitoring exercises to satisfy managerial drives to demonstrate quality and efficiency within quality assurance processes. Observation feedback is fed back to management ostensibly to share good practice and identify development needs but such feedback also acts as evidence of participation and thus has been argued to be a form of managerial control at the strategic level (Shortland 2004a). POT is also operational in its day-to-day objectives of acting as a potential training initiative, for example within HE lecturing training programmes (Peel & Shortland 2004). It may also be viewed as a 'transformatory tool', supporting 'individuality and empowerment' (Peel 2005, p.501) encouraging learning

and critical reflection. The focus in this paper rests upon the role of POT as a developmental tool making use of CPD to promote developmental objectives, although recognition is given to the wide spectrum of purposes attributed to peer observation and thus the inhibiting factors surrounding its use in practice.

Megginson and Whitaker (2003) suggest that CPD rests at the individual level and this implies that the learner is in control and integrates all aspects of learning through life experiences, using experiential learning to look forward and to reflect back. As such, the authors argue, CPD can be supported by employers or carried out in indifferent, even hostile environments (*op. cit.*). Yet if CPD is to be achieved at the individual level via POT developmental initiatives within HE, various factors become critical to a successful outcome. These include trust and justice because of the sense of apprehension (Bell 2001) and even vulnerability and exposure (Loughran & Gunstone 1997) that can be involved when inviting someone into the class to observe one's teaching. This has consequent implications for power relations (Shortland 2004a) and potential ramifications in terms of identified development needs (NATFHE 2001). In addition, a partnership approach is required resting on collaboration and collegiality (Rowland 2000). This is important as POT involves issues of participation and politics at both the individual and organisational levels (Francis 2001; O'Neil & Pennington 1992). However, if such subjectively oriented issues can be operationalised, it is argued that a research agenda might be drawn up to frame and provide the basis for analysis of these potential difficulties or problem areas when engaging in CPD via POT.

POT – A Suggested Model for Research and Practice

Adopting a positivistic stance, a linear model for developmental learning associated with POT practice in HE may be proposed (Figure 1), thereby presenting a potential claim that individuals willing to learn, prepared to take ownership of their learning and development and thus invest time in so doing, can participate in the generation of a supportive climate with peers to undertake peer observation for their own developmental purposes. Recognising the role of both training interventions and the input of experiential learning in POT and CPD (Shortland 2004b), the proposed taxonomy builds upon experiential learning theory as exemplified in Kolb's (1984) model through which concrete experience forms a foundation which is transformed through observation, reflection, theorisation and testing into new knowledge.

However, although experiential learning may be used as a framework within which to set research into CPD initiatives through the use of POT, by adopting an actor-centred model of analysis the taxonomy proposed in this article may be used to take the argument further, and to operationalise factors to guide empirical research. Through comparison with issues found to be influential in relationship-building in industry, it is argued that if

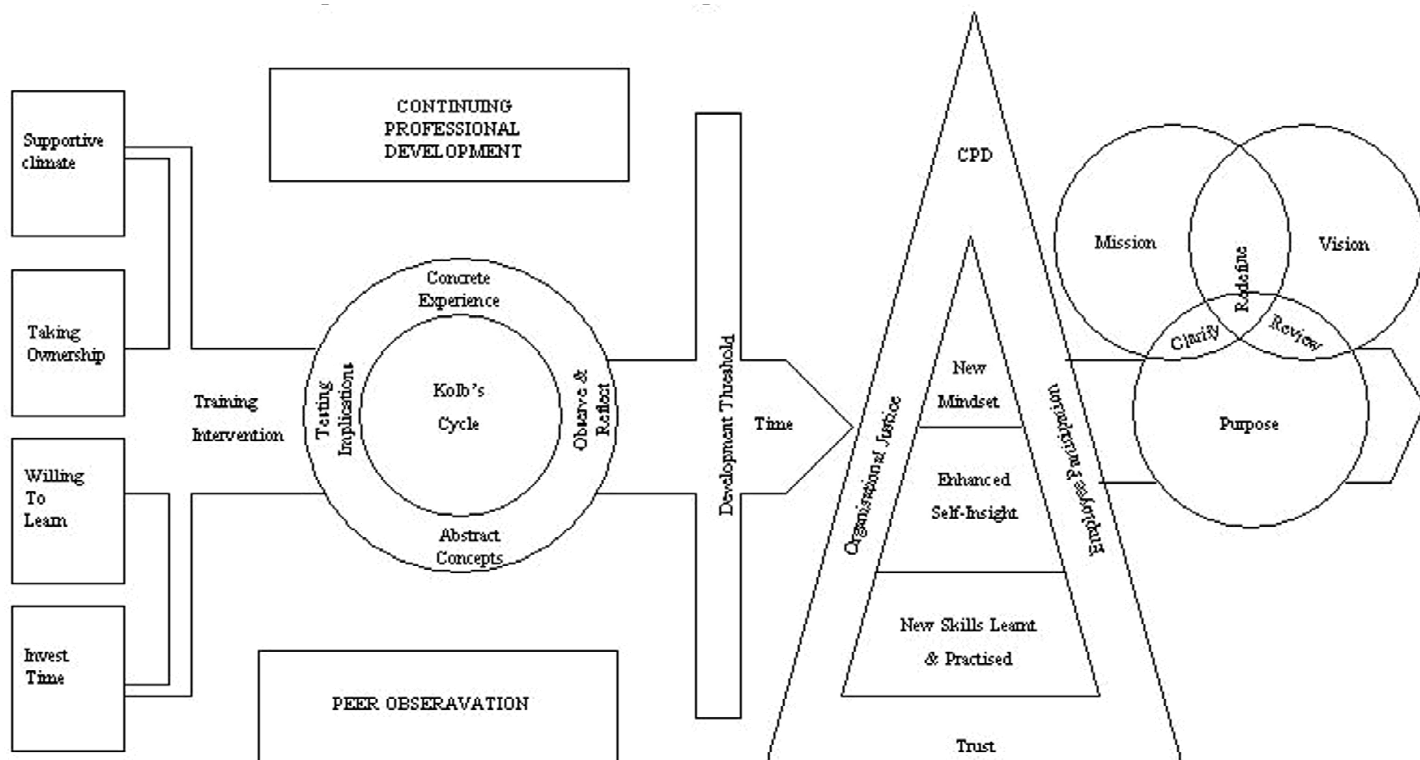


Figure 1: Peer Observation of Teaching: a Model for Research and Practice in HE

CPD is to be achieved by lecturers through peer observation, there is a requirement for institutional and individual attention to be paid – and commitment generated – to three key issues: employee participation (recognising political climates), organisational justice and trust. In the light of the model represented visually above, to summarise argument so far and what is yet to come, these issues are explored in turn.

Positivist models and the research based upon them focus on observable, functionally necessary, and politically neutral, objective reality (Johnson & Duberley 2000). Although the model here implies an ‘objective’ view of ‘reality’ that researchers may observe, the inclusion within it of concepts such as participation, organisational justice and trust highlight the socially constructed nature of the POT process. Account therefore needs to be taken of inter-personal relationships (including power) and employee-organisation relations (including politics) including the social ‘reality’ created through our own consciousness and the political nature of workplace interactions and relationships. Thus, a subjective view of ‘reality’ is required, to capture and interpret the proximal conditions within which developmental learning may be either enabled or inhibited. The model may be applied within future empirical research into developmental POT and CPD but its relevance as a positivistic tool and its limitations in action are mediated through consideration of the contentious issues surrounding employee participation, organisational justice and trust within settings comprising political and power relationships.

Taxonomy in the POT Process

The Importance of Learning within POT

Although Brockbank and McGill (1998) suggest that there is no single theory of learning that embraces all the activities involved in human learning, the role of learning through working with peers in a social setting can be considered to be an important part of POT. Social learning theory suggests that much human learning is grounded in social context: we assess the functional value and appropriateness of beliefs, attitudes and behaviours by assessing the consequences of others’ actions (Smylie 1995). As Bandura (1977; 1986) notes, we learn through an understanding of how individual behaviour and the environment interact and we do this through learning enactively (by doing) and vicariously (by observing others). Smylie (1995), drawing upon Bandura (1977; 1986) contends that in the context of teaching this generates beliefs about the relationship between our actions and expected outcomes and our self-efficacy in taking actions necessary to achieve our desired outcomes. It can therefore be argued that to engage in POT, individuals must show willingness to learn from observing others as well as from the feedback received from being observed. This requires making sense of the messages transmitted in the associated communications process (Gurdam 1995) and taking ownership of learning derived from it. However, self-efficacy (in Bandura’s terms, *op. cit.*) requires a supportive climate both institutionally and within the POT pairing or cluster (Shortland 2004a; 2004b). Engaging in POT is a time-consuming activity (NATFHE 2001) and thus invest-

ment in time by the institution to enable peers to participate in a POT scheme and, at the individual level, for peers to build relationships, is necessary if a supportive climate for development through POT is to be generated (Shortland 2004b).

Thus, the factors of investment in time, willingness to learn, taking ownership of learning and the generation of a supportive climate underpin POT at its very basic level of providing a training intervention to share practice, through reflection and dialogue, enabling 'staff to learn from each other' (NATFHE 2001, p.2).

The Use of Experiential Learning within POT and CPD

Training interventions are typically systematic, short-term skills transfer initiatives (Boydell, Leary, Megginson & Pedlar 1991). However, peer observation does not have this at its heart, not being ostensibly 'judgemental' as to what lecturing staff can or cannot do. Rather its purpose is 'developmental' (NATFHE 2001). The aim is that any learning in the form of skills transfer should, through the discussion and reflection that typically underpins POT, promote development, implying a longer-term process of growth through which individuals cross a threshold of qualitative significance resulting in change to their professional lives (Boydell *et al.* 1991). Developmental initiatives frequently rely on experiential learning whereby, in Kolb's (1984) terms, knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. The peer partnerships, if they remain together, can engage in observation, theorising and testing of practices and ideas leading to professional and personal development (Shortland 2004b) over time.

Recognising the role of training interventions and the input of experiential learning in POT and CPD, the proposed taxonomy here builds upon experiential learning theory as exemplified in Kolb's (1984) model through which concrete experience is transformed through observation, reflection, theorisation and testing into new knowledge. This process results in new understandings and capability development (McGill & Weil 1989) and that constructed knowledge leads to action (Moon 1999) and therefore forms the basis of new experiences. Drawing upon Gibbs (1993, p.35) the proposed model's inclusion of the Kolb cycle (Shortland 2004b, p.4) reflects that experiential learning can:

- ❖ 'help lecturers identify their own learning need, to reflect upon practice and increase awareness of their experience;
- ❖ help them to share experience with supportive colleagues and make sense of them;
- ❖ provide support for risk-taking and experimentation;
- ❖ offer new concepts with which to analyse their teaching and new methods to try out in their teaching.'

Training interventions can lead to new skills being learned and practised. Development can lead to enhanced self-insight and a new mindset. CPD implies that this process is continuing and requires us to put energy into our own development (Megginson & Whitaker 2003). It is simplistic and naïve, however, to assume that POT proceeds alone on these bases without recognition of the complex and political nature of other interventions – both organisational and interpersonal – and the impact that these have. Therefore, the model proposed here attempts to identify and categorise these. It thus highlights the less frequently articulated potential barriers to achieving idealised personal and professional development and considers how we, as individuals, might use emergent, enhanced self-insight and mindsets to clarify, review and redefine our purpose, mission and vision (Hargreaves 1995) as lecturers within our respective organisational systems. This article therefore now focuses on the complex and political organisational and individual contexts of employee participation, justice and trust.

The Benefits of Employee Participation within POT

POT is usually presented as a top-down, rather than a bottom-up initiative (Peel 2005) and, although deemed to be developmental in purpose, it is used judgementally (Hopkins 1993) if only because peer evaluation rests on making a judgement of 'good practice' from a personal baseline. Being observed can present 'discomfort' (Peel 2005), even threat, particularly in terms of power relationships (Shortland 2004a). The POT process within managerial quality enhancement initiatives relies significantly on voluntary participation by lecturing staff in order to collect data on teaching practice and requirements for staff development. Bearing these issues in mind, when new peer observation schemes are designed, employee participation could potentially provide constructive input in determining best process; the involvement of potential participants at this early stage is critical to generating trust in, and the successful take-up and operation of, such initiatives once launched. An analogy can be made with the design of employee payment systems (Cox 2000). Cox argues that by seeking information from employees a fuller understanding of current problems can be obtained and this information used 'thus increasing the chance that they will be resolved in the design of the new system' (p.363).

'Voice' concerns the opportunity for employees to express their views (Cox 2000) although it has a varied set of meanings ranging from two-way communication or dialogue between employer and employees, through to notions that employees have power to persuade, with the term also relating to legitimate expression of collective aims (Gollan 2006). Sako (1998, p.5) identifies 'four distinct camps' in respect of employee voice within industry. The first concerns managerial prerogative in which employee voice is deemed unnecessary – although she argues that there is little support for this

authoritarian approach within industry. The second supports direct employee participation to capture knowledge and skills but is against representative participation. Sako (1998) comments that employee involvement at the direct participation level but without representative participation 'is like being asked to contribute without having a real say' (p.7). The third approach supports representative participation but opposes direct participation. Sako suggests that this appears to be an approach that places emphasis on 'representation per se and not with business performance' (*ibid.*). The final 'camp' believes in giving employees influence at both operational and policy levels and operates on the basis that synergy can result from both direct and representative forms of participation. Sako favours this synergistic approach suggesting both are necessary to bring about good performance.

In the development of POT initiatives, university management may also take a number of approaches to the consideration of employee 'voice'. Following Sako's (1998) four camps model, the implications for POT can be considered. In the authoritarian approach, for example, the managerial prerogative holds sway and employee voice is considered unnecessary. POT schemes are aligned with organisational strategy and launched with minimal or no employee involvement. In the second model employees are consulted directly and their expertise and ideas are harnessed and incorporated within POT policy documentation and practice. In the third, consultation on the design and implementation of POT is carried out only with lecturing unions and an agreed policy is implemented. Such an approach might provide protection against POT becoming a form of mandatory appraisal and in reducing managerial emphasis on the use of POT as part of quality monitoring. In the final scenario a mixed approach to consultation is used with union involvement and individual participation playing a role in policy formulation and implementation.

Translating these industrial participation models into POT within universities raises notions of power in respect of managements' willingness to consult directly with affected employees: those being asked or required to participate in POT schemes and with lecturing unions. From an employee perspective, participation and involvement initiatives may result in greater commitment to participation and POT scheme objectives. Without consultation employees may pay only 'lip service' to participation in POT, completing scheme documentation merely to satisfy management and highlight their needs while refusing to participate in observations (Shortland 2004a) thereby undertaking an act of resistance to participation while not being viewed as 'misbehaving' (Knights & McCabe 2000).

Further research in this area might therefore, for example, explore the hypothesis that openness by HE management to both direct and representative forms of employee participation (Gollan 2006) in the design of POT schemes is likely to correlate with higher levels of express commitment among lecturing staff to associated quality assurance initiatives. Research might also exam-

ine the potential link between scheme design and interest in the use of POT as a mechanism to further CPD.

The Importance of Organisational Justice within POT

Issues of participation are linked to perceptions of justice and associated power relationships. As peer observation involves one lecturer observing another's teaching with the aim of providing feedback to identify, for example, good practice and developmental needs, notions of interpersonal relationships involving power, politics and equity arise. At the individual level, it might be considered whether the process of peer observation provides a means of ensuring some form of 'equitable' outcome, such as whether the observer and observed are giving and receiving feedback that they believe to be 'fair' and 'just'. At the organisational level, it might be investigated how the POT process influences lecturers' perceptions of their employing organisation. In these senses, organisational justice has applicability to both the process and outcomes of peer observation.

Organisational justice research is divided into two main theoretical strands: reactive and proactive (Greenberg 1987). Reactive justice concerns how individuals respond to particular acts and the implications that this has in terms of altering their sense of justice, whereas proactive justice focuses on developing models to achieve positive justice perceptions (Cox 2000). In terms of peer observation, reactive justice can be applied to the act of peer observation itself and the interpersonal feedback given while the proactive approach relates to the design of the observation scheme and the feedback to management.

Perceptions of reactive and proactive justice are affected by power, politics and equity. The political nature of HE is apparent from the institutional to the individual level. At the institutional level, for example, the drives to increase graduate numbers in an as yet not clearly proven bid to increase economic output (Wolf 2002) and to meet quality assurance requirements (Underwood 2000) place heavy demands on course teams and institutions (O'Neil & Pennington 1992). Although Fullerton (1999) comments that quality assurance has led to staff accepting observation as integral to their development, the top-down nature of the process (Peel 2005) can fuel resistance and defensiveness (Gosling 2000). Brockbank and McGill (1998) point out that systems within HE are not value-free and the exercise of power together with the adversarial nature encouraged in which concepts are put on trial can influence progress in learning from peer observation. However, Smylie (1995) takes a more positive view in noting that peer observation in environments with shared authority, open communication and collaboration aids learning. Notions of power, politics and equity perceptions change over time as relationships change among and between individuals, departments and institutions. As a result perceptions of justice change and are likely to impact on participation in – and views of – peer observation.

Distributive, procedural and interactional justice

Organisational justice comprises three main forms: distributive, procedural and interactional justice. Distributive justice refers to an individual's perception of the outcome of a decision, that is, the degree to which it is thought to be 'fair'. Procedural justice refers to an individual's perception of the process and means by which a decision is reached and whether these are considered as 'fair'. Interactional justice refers to the sensitivity with which an individual is treated and the sincerity used in enacting procedures to make a decision and in communicating it (Cox 2000 citing Tyler & Bies 1990 in Folger & Cropanzano 1998).

In the peer observation process each of these forms of organisational justice plays a critical role; the feedback given by a peer after an observation falls into the category of distributive justice. Very much limited to the issue at hand, this category involves concerns over equality, equity and need. As Cox (2004, citing Deutsch 1985) suggests, equality of opportunity to receive an equally favourable outcome is an essential element of distributive justice as individuals compare their inputs, and the outputs resulting from them, with chosen comparators (in this case their peer observation partner). For distributive justice to be considered as potentially fair, the checklists used to observe teaching practice and classroom interactions should, for example, be in line with the lecturer's need for feedback on 'preferred' areas and reflect that person's preferred observation criteria, namely the basis upon which s/he wished to be observed.

Procedural justice is linked closely to participation and employee voice (Cox 2004). The 'fair process effect' (*op. cit.*) means that if individuals have a say in the decision-making (for example the design of a POT scheme) it enhances their perceptions of procedural fairness. Perceptions of procedural justice are also associated with organisational commitment and relationships with management and can serve as criteria through which management is deemed to be untrustworthy, given an absence of information from other sources (*op. cit.*). So, for example, if lecturers are not consulted and a POT scheme is imposed, employees may feel aggrieved – their views are unwanted or ignored – and such failure to consult can result in increased demands for voice and representation to achieve procedural justice (*op. cit.*). Lack of consultation can also result in flaws in a scheme; those who have to carry out the procedures are likely to have a better understanding which they can bring into the design of the ground rules (Rawnsley 1993).

However, procedural justice may involve the creation of formal systems or checking procedures which can appear to be at odds with more informal cultures (Cox 2004), such as those created by lecturing colleagues in their everyday working relationships. Peer observation documentation such as requirements for form filling for quality assurance checking purposes is an example of this.

Procedural justice is also closely linked into distributive justice. If procedural justice is rated as high, less emphasis is placed on distributive justice. But if there is an absence of procedures perceived to be 'fair', then employee perceptions focus to a greater extent on distributive outcomes (Cox 2004). How people are viewed in enacting procedures raises the notion of interactional justice. This element is considered to be perhaps the most important type of justice to an individual (Cox 2000 citing Gratton 1999) and it strongly involves interpersonal power and political relationships. Where formal procedures are absent, processes and workplace social encounters become of heightened importance, becoming the most significant and visible aspects of organisational justice (Cox 2004).

Interactional justice has three components: sincerity, sensitivity and communication. The sincerity with which procedures are followed is critical within interactional justice. In peer observation, the degree to which management considers employees' requests for development and resources as outcomes of the process within POT scheme design is an example. Interpersonal sensitivity concerns treating people with politeness and courtesy when a lecturer is participating in the observation process and how their dignity and self-worth are maintained. For example, in the pre-briefing and feedback discussions when issues are highlighted for attention, the tone of voice and body language used by the observer are important issues as well as the content of the feedback discussion. This second component is also known as interpersonal justice. The third concerns the communication of a decision, including use of justifications, explanations and apologies, particularly where the distributive justice outcome is critical or unfavourable. This element is also known as informational justice (Cox 2004) and provides an explanation behind decision-making.

Research in this area is needed to understand the political and power relationships that lie within notions of justice within POT. Research within this area might examine a number of issues, although key areas might include, for example, exploring whether HE management sensitive to both proactive and reactive forms of organisational justice perceptions (Greenberg 1987) achieves greater levels of satisfaction among lecturing staff involved in management-sponsored POT/quality assurance initiatives. At the individual level, research into issues of power relations might be worthy of attention, for example to examine whether and to what degree the use of power that comes from various sources such as position in the hierarchy or through expert knowledge (French & Raven 1958) influences justice perceptions of POT.

Commitment and motivation

Cox's work (2000; 2004) relates to organisational justice in small and medium sized enterprises and focuses on payment systems. Although it is to be acknowledged that highly skilled employees in professional occupations are likely to have different expectations of – and priori-

ties for – organisational justice, some interesting parallels can be made. Cox (2000) notes that participative mechanisms are critical in the operation of group-based pay systems, designed to foster commitment and enhance motivation with organisational commitment being associated with procedural justice and, to an even greater extent, distributive justice.

Peer observation has CPD as one of its drivers, rather than pay. Perhaps by appealing to the continuing spirit of learning within HE, one of the underlying motivations to encourage lecturers' participation in such managerial initiatives and thereby increase organisational commitment is the provision of a mechanism to promote further professional development. But, citing Thompson (1998), Cox (2000) argues that to increase commitment requires building mutual trust. This trust requires attention to be paid to employee perceptions of organisational justice. Unlike distributive and procedural justice with their decision-making contexts, particular attention may be focused on the everyday social interactions without specific outcomes that comprise interactional justice (Cox 2004). The implications of employee perceptions of justice for management concern the fostering of good working relationships, perceptions of power relations and trust between and among management and employees.

Further research might therefore examine the hypothesis that perceived management latitude in enabling individuals and POT pairs/clusters to tailor POT interventions to support their own learning, CPD and professional interests is likely to be correlated with higher levels of enthusiasm among HE lecturing staff towards POT-linked quality assurance initiatives.

The Importance of Trust within POT

Giddens (1990, p.34) defines trust as 'confidence of a person or system, regarding a given set of outcomes or events, where that confidence expresses a faith in the probity or love of another, or in the correctness of abstract principles', while Sako regards it as 'a state of mind, an expectation held by one trading partner about another, that the other behaves or responds in a predictable and mutually acceptable manner' (1992, p.37) and 'including an expectation that neither party will exploit the other's vulnerabilities' (2000, p.89). She argues that trust may be regarded as an augmentable skill that multiplies with use (and atrophies with non-use). It becomes an intangible asset jointly owned by two parties in a relationship, acquired only very slowly but capable of being destroyed very quickly. She views trust as an uneasy mix between a capital asset in which people invest for self interest and a social norm but its predictability in behaviour, existing for different reasons, enables three types of trust – contractual, competence and goodwill – to be distinguished.

Contractual trust implies adherence to ethical standards of keeping promises – based on written or oral agreements – learnt through socialisation and education. Competence trust concerns the expectation that a trading partner will perform their role competently. Both

forms are predicated on universalistic standards determining reputation. Goodwill trust is more diffuse in that it refers to the willingness to do more than is formally expected via open commitment. There are no explicit promises to be fulfilled, nor fixed professional standards to be reached. 'Instead, someone who is worthy of "goodwill trust" is dependable and can be endowed with high discretion, as he can be trusted to take initiatives while refraining from unfair advantage taking' (Sako 1992, p.39).

Managerial initiatives such as POT rely on contractual trust obligations, for example, lecturers participating according to the rules of the scheme and management underpinning these with the provision of resources as appropriate. Competence trust involves the use of existing, and the development of new competencies, via observation, reflection and practice. As such, institution-based trust can be generated through a wide network of diffuse relationships (Sydow 2000). Social bonds, personal networks and shared values are necessary but not sufficient in themselves to create goodwill trust. Rather people must 'feel comfortable enough with the norm of open commitment to use their initiative in responding to unforeseen opportunities without expecting anything in return immediately' (Sako 1992, p.44). Such trust therefore relies on high mutual dependence leading to a willingness to enter into a relationship by careful selection and cultivation of partners through frequent and intense communication, generating predictability through shared meaning and thereby creating a platform for non-opportunistic behaviour (Hardy, Philips & Lawrence 2000). Such trust provides a mechanism to cope with the risk or uncertainty of the exchange relationship (Lane 2000) required within peer observation. Process based trust is built up over time (Liebeskind & Oliver 2000) and develops from the social exchange that takes place during observation and becoming an expectation to be brought to future dealings, while characteristics-based trust develops independently based on personal traits (Sydow 2000). Lane 2000 (citing Sako 2000) comments that a high level of trust between exchange partners developed within a long standing relationship inclines them towards expanding the amount of knowledge they make available to each other in terms of its accuracy, comprehensiveness and timeliness. In turn, this easy information exchange makes the partners more open to each other and inclined towards further collaboration, thus promoting CPD.

Such are the benefits of trust building within peer observation. However, relative dependency has power implications and the creation of forms of trust does not preclude conflict (Hardy *et al.* 2000). It is possible that although partners in POT schemes might experience contractual and competence trust, goodwill trust may remain elusive, as it 'involves a gradual expansion in the congruence in beliefs about what is acceptable behaviour' (Sako 2000, p.89). As Sako states in her earlier work, (1992, p.44): 'The willingness to be in someone's debt is an important signal of "goodwill trust"' but for some people 'open commitment and a permanent state

of indebtedness are onerous' as their values would undermine goodwill trust through their desire for autonomy and independence. The peer observation relationship can provide a façade behind which power may be hidden and collaboration may be merely rhetoric concealing vested interest – trust being merely illusory (Hardy *et al.* 2000).

Opinions vary on whether goodwill trust can be created by intent. For some it is a by-product of familiarity and friendship (Sako 1992, citing Gambetta 1988). Friends and acquaintances can come to be trusted but friendship cannot intentionally be cultivated for the purposes of creating goodwill trust – as so doing implies instrumentality. This leads to the proposition that only strong personal networks can build and rely on goodwill trust.

Research might explore the hypothesis that where stable personal networks indicative of interpersonal trust exist among lecturing staff, greater express commitment towards POT developmental initiatives by HE management is likely to be observable. Research might further examine the impact of requirements to change peer observation partnerships on commitment to participate in POT.

Implications for organisational efficiency

Although there are likely to be high set up costs involved in generating trust, trust is deemed critical to organisational efficiency. Once established, trust stabilises relationships (Sydow 2000). Indeed, trust is considered an important co-ordination mechanism and as a precondition for superior performance and competitive success in the new business environment (Lane 2000). Contractual trust encourages disclosure of truthful information, reducing the need for threats and sanctions.

Competence trust should reduce costs as less monitoring of quality should be required. Competence trust, for example, can encourage the development and practice of new skills in the classroom as part of the outcomes of peer observation. Goodwill trust also encourages truthfulness and promises a high degree of effort and dynamic responses to new situations through flexibility supported by communication (Sako 1992). Mutual dependence on the basis of openness can create vulnerability, but mutual trust can nevertheless be built up in an ongoing successful relationship based on the development of shared norms of good conduct, habits or routines which lower attention to both opportunities and incentives for opportunism, and possibly through the generation of bonds of friendship (Nooteboom, de Jong, Vossen, Helper & Sako 2000). As such, trust relations built from communications within peer observation can lead to enhanced self-insight with the potential for the development of a new mindset.

However, although open commitment from goodwill trust helps to unleash effort, at the same time it closes off access by outsiders to personal networks. So the beneficial effect of trust in creating reliable expectations, necessary for flexible responses, can turn into excessive rigidity. In POT schemes, provision may be made for changing peer partnerships – the managerial intention

being ostensibly to widen learning and development opportunities (although a hidden motive – with trust implications – of breaking up what are seen as 'cosy' peer relationships may be suspected or even directly articulated). Although such 'turnover' makes trust-building difficult – to build trust partners who share no common meanings must create shared meaning where none existed before (Hardy *et al.* 2000) – there may be ramifications regarding the link between interpersonal trust and how it affects institutional trust. Communities which rely heavily on personal trust may find it difficult to make the transition to institutionalised trust. This means that they find it hard to have dealings outside of their immediate circle – and this limits the size and scope of their activities (Crouch, Finegold & Sako 2001) – potentially giving weight to management's arguments for reconfiguring peer observation partnerships.

Institutional trust moves away from interpersonal familiarity – organisational actors cannot rely on personal characteristics or shared experiences but have to turn to this impersonal form of trust within organisational structures (Lane 2000). But such structures do not determine levels of trust, rather they reveal opportunities and constraints for actors in executing it. So as Sydow (2000, drawing upon Kramer 1996) argues, a trust sensitive management is needed to act as 'an intuitive auditor', monitoring the foundations of trust relations if POT schemes are to bring benefits to HE institutions such as quality enhancement within teaching.

Further research might therefore examine the hypothesis that willingness to participate openly in POT initiatives is likely to be observable among lecturing staff who perceive that HE management may be trusted to organise and use the results of associated quality assurance programmes in ways that stabilise institution-employee relationships. Research into the provision of resources to support identified staff development needs arising from POT and managerial control over these (Shortland 2004a) might also be worthy of further examination in respect of how these link to trust relationships.

A Research Agenda

Although a linear, positivistic model of POT practice is proposed in this article, it comprises elements that individually or in combination enable a more richly nuanced research agenda for POT, CPD and as a consequence institutional quality assurance. The concluding section of this paper summarises how these strands may be drawn together to inform and guide action signalled by the concepts and associated research hypotheses outlined throughout.

Research into POT is burgeoning with greater academic research interest in evidence. HE Academy business conferences are supportive of peer observation papers addressing issues such as its effectiveness within teaching (Hodgkinson 2003) and in fostering supportive learning and teaching cultures (Roberts *et al.* 2002). However, it is presented in this paper that the roles of

participation, organisational justice and trust in POT schemes have particular importance for those involved in the process. Potentially these go beyond competency development, self-awareness and new ways of viewing teaching practices and relationships presented within peer observation research (Shortland 2004b). CPD implies a forward moving force and has the potential to take lecturers into new realms. This might be of particular value as linear careers decline in favour of portfolio careers (Handy 1994) and thus as individuals have to take greater responsibility for their own career paths. In addition, as emphasis grows on the role of HRD within performance management and thus the role of developmental appraisals in preparing employees for non-linear careers (Reid *et al.* 2004), so greater attention is likely to be paid to CPD within an organisational context. The role of CPD within POT for developmental purposes within performance review systems might therefore be researched.

The impact of consultation and employee involvement in POT scheme design and implementation is an area that provides scope for detailed future research initiatives. Perceptions of organisational justice and their impact on POT scheme outcomes at both the institutional and individual levels might also be explored rigorously. Further research into the role of building trust and its potential implications both for the social actors and at the institutional level may also prove fruitful. The model presented here is but a preliminary one and further research may draw out other areas of importance to be incorporated within it, thus furthering its scope.

It is recognised that participation, justice and trust are subjective issues and thus further research in relation to these aspects of POT may well be better located within qualitative, case study (Yin 2003) or ethnomethodological (Delamont & Atkinson 1995) research paradigms. Yet, however it is addressed, further research into continuing peer observation relationships built on trust and supported via systems of participation and justice might lead to the potential for lecturers to clarify, review and redefine their purpose, mission and vision (Hargreaves 1995) as lecturers' learn more about themselves in the process (Jarzabkowski & Bone 1998). Using employee participation, organisational justice and trust as theoretical backdrops could therefore form the basis of a future series of research studies to this end, providing operational detail and thus taking developmental POT and related CPD knowledge forward.

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