

Professional Development meets Personal Development: The Impact of a Master's Programme on Alumni

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Published in The Wiley Handbook of Global Workplace Learning

Editor(s): Vanessa Hammler Kenon, Sunay Vasant Palsole

First published: 25 March 2019

Print ISBN: 9781119226994 | Online ISBN: 9781119227793 | DOI: 10.1002/9781119227793

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Abstract

Since 2003 a two-year, part-time Master of Science (MSc) in Education and Training Management (eLearning) has been offered by Dublin City University (DCU). The programme is inquiry-based and practice-led, which enables students to contribute to change in work practices and social situations. This study reports on the professional and personal impact of the MSc. An online survey was developed, the purpose of which was to examine reasons for applying to the programme and the impact of the programme on past participants' professional and personal lives. The main findings suggest that the principal reason students apply to the MSc is for career progression. Upon completing the programme, the evidence shows that participants have been effective in progressing in their careers due to the skills and insights gained. Participants have actively influenced, shaped and improved their workplaces. A notable finding from this research highlights the level of personal growth experienced by participants.

Keywords: action research, reflective practice, master's programme, professional development, personal development, alumni

Professional Development meets Personal Development: Impact of a Master's Programme on Alumni

Jeannot, Stoll and Chastonay (2013) claim that many programme evaluations are limited to the perception of students, whereas extending evaluations to include alumni could be more beneficial as their viewpoints of a programme are often based on or shaped by their own professional contexts. A study into the effects of an MEd programme on teachers' professional development (Trumper and Eldar, 2014) highlighted how teachers' participation in a programme of study influenced their teaching and perceptions, but yet they felt restricted when trying to apply new ideas acquired from the programme to their workplace. It is evident that the sustainable impact of educational programmes remains under-researched (Zehetmeier, Andreitz, Erlacher and Rauch, 2015).

Our research study focuses on mature learners on a Master's programme who bring with them a wealth of practical knowledge from their own life and work experience (Tiffin et al., 2003). We share Tosey and Marshall's (2017) view that it is important to document the value of action-based postgraduate programmes especially in light of observations that a number of postgraduate programmes in the UK whose pedagogies were characterised by inquiry-based, action-oriented experiential learning, which were thriving twenty years ago, have closed over the past few years.

This research study aims to explore the characteristics of students applying for a Master of Science (MSc) in Education and Training Management (eLearning) at Dublin City University (DCU) and the impact of the programme on their professional and personal lives. An online survey was developed using Google Forms. A mixture of open-ended and closed questions was used. Open-ended questions were mainly used to collect data on participants' perspectives, feelings and experiences. Analysis was conducted using thematic content

analysis. A notable finding is that alumni referred to the role that a supportive learning environment played to facilitate growth and transformation. From a professional perspective, alumni felt empowered and equipped to improve their workplace situation.

Philosophical underpinnings of the MSc programme

The MSc is a two-year, part-time programme, which was established at DCU in 2002. Participants are drawn from a range of disciplinary and professional backgrounds and work in the widely varying fields of education, industry, health, community, creative arts, NGOs, government departments and state agencies. The programme is offered through a blended approach whereby participants benefit from synchronous web conferencing and face-to-face settings. There is an understanding that participants need to develop technical skills within a critically reflective framework if they are to creatively design and use technology to transform educational practice. The MSc is underpinned by an action research approach where practitioners are encouraged to conduct research in their practice with the intent to bring about a change or improvement, aligned with values that are rational and just, and specific to the situation. The philosophical underpinnings of the programme emerged from the individual doctoral research studies conducted by Crotty (2012) and Farren (2006) as they clarified the meaning of their educational values in the course of their emergence in practice.

In her doctoral research Crotty (2012) clarifies and explains what it means to have an educational entrepreneurial spirit. This explanation includes acknowledging her values of passion and care, safety, creativity and excellence within her practice. The communication of these values required her to move beyond text-based accounts to include multimedia forms of representation (Eisner, 1997). She emphasises the importance of creating safe environments to enable meaningful, enjoyable and creative learning to take place. Farren demonstrates how her values were transformed into living standards of judgement that include a web of

betweenness and pedagogy of the unique. Farren has been influenced by the Irish philosopher John O'Donohue's (2003, pp. 132-133) use of the term 'web of betweenness'. She suggests that the communications rich characteristics of ICT can re-create in new forms the powerfully interactive traditional world whose passing O' Donohue laments and justifies applying O' Donohue's term. ICT and emerging technologies can support a dialogic-collaborative approach to learning and bring us closer to the meanings of our educational values as they emerge in the course of our practice. Pedagogy of the unique (Farren, 2006) respects the unique constellation of values and standards of judgement that each practitioner-researcher contributes to a knowledge base of practice. It involves systematic processes of action and reflection and inspires thinking towards developing one's own pedagogy.

Since the start of their work in higher education, Farren and Crotty have supported postgraduate students to recognise and examine the values that guide their practice, and in doing so enhance their personal knowledge base for professional practice. In agreement with Barnett's (2000) call for a higher education that embraces knowledge, self-identify and action in its pedagogies (2000, p. 164). Programme participants are encouraged to take time out of their busy schedule to 'stop and think' (Arendt, 1998) and to reflect on action (Schön, 1987). They are guided to enquire into their pedagogical practice, create educational multimedia resources that relate to that practice and reflect on the process. They are given space to explore and articulate their values and provide evidence of how they are living these values in practice. In this way they are taking responsibility for their own personal and professional development. In the words of Carl Rogers "the only learning which significantly influences behaviour is self-discovered, self-appropriated learning" (Rogers, 1969 - p.153).

Teaching on postgraduate degree programmes pose a challenge as the students are part-time and may not have been in formal education for some time. While participants entering the MSc may feel competent in their work context, the challenge of returning to

study, meeting new people from a range of work backgrounds, researching and writing assignments and entering the academic discourse can prove quite daunting at the start. Crotty's (2012) idea of a safe learning environment is to immediately name the students possible concerns and bring these to the fore in order to alleviate any initial fear. In this way, enthusiasm replaces anxiety; confidence replaces fear; and collaboration replaces reservation. She emphasises the importance of having a vision for technology rather than focusing on technical skills alone. This led to the development of an entrepreneurial methodology – an Educational Entrepreneurial Approach (EEA) to action research—with its four steps: Exploring, Understanding, Creating and Transforming, which is designed to guide practitioner-researchers as they embrace digital technology to resolve an identified need in a workplace context (Crotty, 2014). Through the course of the MSc participants are actively engaged in carrying out research in their work context or in improving a social situation, using inquiry processes which involves; critically reflecting on their learning through the use of online journals, engaging in assessment for learning tasks, experimenting with different forms of multimedia, collaborating with peers in group work, participating in peer validation meetings, and bringing new ideas and innovations into action.

The intention in supporting practitioners to research their own practice is primarily to enable them to grow in self-knowledge by critically reflecting on their own beliefs, values and professional practices, leading to new understandings of themselves and others in ways, which they experience as transformative. We agree with Steier (1991, p. 180) that with the observer situated within his or her research enquiry, there is the making of a reflexive methodology for research. Thus, theory is seen as situated in practice, explaining and energising human exchanges in transforming social contexts (Farren, 2006, Farren and Crotty, 2014).

Critical Reflective Practice and Action Research

Our approach to designing a continuing education programme such as the MSc is influenced by ideas, over time, that have become key in the learning of professionals about changing and evaluating their practice. Some key terms include reflection (Dewey, 1933), reflective practitioner (Schön, 1987); community of practice (Lave, Jean and Wenger E., 1991).

The philosopher John Dewey understood reflection as an “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds supporting it and future conclusions to which it tends” (Dewey, 1933, p. 6). He understood that reflective thinking begins when one encounters a problem “an entanglement to be straightened out, something obscure to be cleared up” (Dewey, 1933, p. 6). He believed that before one could engage in reflection certain attitudes were required, these included open-mindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness. Thus reflection is more than a skill, as it requires the person to have certain characteristics in order to reflect. For Dewey, thinking is an active process that involves constructing hypothesis and testing them out in practice. Dewey led the way for Schön's (1987) idea of reflection in professional practice. For Schön reflection happens when ‘knowing-in-action’, or the knowledge that professionals depend on to carry out their work, spontaneously produces a surprise, which can lead to either ‘reflection-in-action’ or ‘reflection-on-action’. The former occurs immediately during the activity by thinking about possible ways to reshape the activity. The latter occurs following or by interrupting the activity. Both Dewey and Schön considered reflection as researching or experimenting in the field of practice.

Of particular relevance is Brookfield's (1998) suggestion that critically reflective practitioners constantly research their assumptions by seeing practice through four

complementary lenses; 1. autobiographical, 2. the students'/learners' eyes, 3. our colleagues' experiences, and 4. theoretical, philosophical and research literature.

Brookfield proposes that as well as reflecting on our own personal beliefs, we reflect through the lens of others, in order to bring in different perspectives including theory. The essential collaboration with others implied by Brookfield demands a professional practice that involves a continuous communication with fellow practitioners: a community of practice (Lave, Jean and Wenger E., 1991).

Brookfield's Lens 1, the autobiographical lens, prompts us as educators to reflect back on our experience as a student/learner as an important source of insight. In this way, we "become aware of the paradigmatic assumptions and instinctive reasonings that frame how we work" (Brookfield, 1995, p. 30). In applying lens 2, our students' eyes, we see ourselves through our learners' eyes in order to discover if the students are interpreting our actions in the way that is intended. For Brookfield (*ibid*), the student lens reveals "those actions and assumptions that either confirms or challenge existing power relationships in the classroom". Lens 3, refers to our colleagues experiences. Talking to colleagues about concerns and issues in our practice and gaining their perspective can provide useful insights. Further to the individual personal reflection, the sharing of individual narratives creates a sense of community. In lens 4, an engagement with scholarly literature can help us to describe and understand the context of our practice and "the link between our private troubles and broader political processes" (1995, p. 37-38).

Critical reflection therefore enables practitioners to enquire into their own practice in a systematic and scholarly way. Jarvis, (1992, p. 180) claims that engaging in critical reflection enables practitioners to "continue to learn, grow and develop in and through practice". In the messy field of practice or the 'swampy lowlands' (Schön, 1995) it is difficult to predict outcomes. Schön argued against the dominant model of technical rationality that is

built into the modern university and proposed a new scholarship which he termed an epistemology of practice (1995). He suggested that this new scholarship would take the form of action research.

McTaggart (1996) rightly points out that action research is not a 'procedure' for research but is a series of commitments to observe and problematise through practice a series of principles for conducting social enquiry, it is also a departure from unengaged research as an inquiry path (Farren, 2006). The word 'action' means that it is an approach that always involves participants making or implementing change, rather than just investigating an issue, and the word 'research' is about making informed decisions about what and how participants are going to bring about change (Piggot-Irvine, 2002). The Educational Entrepreneurial Approach (EEA) to action research (Crotty, 2014) is a creative approach that engages students in the design and creation of an educational multimedia resource (for example, video, online educational resources) to bring about change.

Methods

The MSc was evaluated using a mixture of closed- and open-ended questions in the form of an online survey administered via Google forms. Open-ended questions were mostly used to gather data on the participants' perspectives, feelings and experiences. Close attention was paid to language used in the responses and emerging patterns and meanings of human experience were thus analysed (Saldana, J. 2013). Analysis was carried out using thematic content analysis. Quotations from data collected are used in this report to illustrate key themes.

The survey was carried out in 2013. It was sent to past graduates of the MSc, since the programme's inception in 2003. Participants of the course in 2013-2015 were excluded from the survey, as they had not completed the programme. Therefore 157 surveys were sent online to past participants from 2003-2014, of which 105 responses were received. This

resulted in a 67% response rate. Data was gathered over a four-week period.

The purpose of the survey was to examine the characteristics of programme graduates and their reasons for participating in the programme. A further significant aim of the survey was to determine and subsequently analyse if and how the programme may have impacted participants' personal or professional lives. A coding procedure was applied to the qualitative data gathered.

To correctly analyse qualitative responses, it was necessary to apply a correct coding procedure to the data gathered. Each response from the online survey results was read in detail. This followed an inductive, exploratory reasoning approach to the data gathered. Brief periods away from the data, allowed time to reflect on the analysis to date and identify patterns emerging from the data. Open-ended questions were thus analysed per question so that patterns could be identified accordingly. This technique follows an 'immersion-crystallization' approach, which is an approach similar to the one used by Holmes, Zayas and Koyfman (2012).

Thematic analysis in qualitative research involves examining themes within the data. Due to the open-ended nature of questions used in this particular study, a large part of the data gathered focused on the human experience, perceptions and feelings, with regard to participation on the programme. Participants were asked to explain their thoughts on the programme's impact on their personal and professional life. With respect to the professional impact of the programme, participants were asked if they were able to bring about change in their organisation and if so did the MSc enable this. The purpose of such questions was to determine if participants were able to apply the skills and knowledge from the course to the workplace.

Findings and Discussion

The survey response rate was 67%. Among the respondents 40% were male and 60% were female. The majority of respondents (45%) were between twenty five and thirty four years of age at start of their participation on the programme. 34% had between five to ten years experience in their profession at the time of commencing the programme, 31% had more than ten years' experience in their profession. At the time of beginning the programme, respondents worked in a variety of contexts including:

- post-primary education (25%)
- primary education (14%)
- industry (9%)
- higher education (8%)
- further education (6%)
- adult education (7%)
- health (7%)
- state agency (5%)
- creative arts (5%)
- others such as voluntary sector, government organisation, banking, Teaching English as a Foreign Language and community development

This variety of professional contexts was deemed useful to 94% of respondents' learning experience. Benefits included more interesting discussions, sharing of perspectives, skills and experiences, and exposure to fields outside ones' everyday work context. A participant responded that 'The mix of professionals helped me to step outside my own context. It is too easy to become defined by your personal day- to-day experience. In order to understand how things can change and improve within your own context, it was important to

be exposed to experiences of others.' 66% of people have changed jobs since completing the programme. 95% confirmed that the programme had met their expectations, another 5% expressed that the 'no' in this response was not negative in the sense that they had not expected the level of creativity and enjoyment unleashed during programme:

My answer of 'no', in question 12 isn't a negative answer at all - there were a number of outcomes from the course that I really wasn't expecting! I wasn't expecting the course to have such a creative element to it. This was an unexpected and extremely welcome surprise. In that respect it surpassed my expectations. I also wasn't expecting to find myself so emotionally invested in my participation in the course. Identifying our values and the reason why we held those values forced me to face up to issues that I never knew I had!

96% of respondents acknowledged that the programme enabled them to develop on a personal level. The majority reported an increase in confidence and self-belief.

Qualitative data from the survey responses offered a more in-depth and descriptive evaluation of their programme experience. Five key themes emerged characterising participants' reasons for applying to the programme: (1) career development; (2) to obtain a formal qualification; (3) the further understanding of education and technology; (4) to upskill; and (5) personal development. These themes are elaborated on under 'Reasons for Applying.' The key findings regarding the impact of the programme are summarised under 'Professional Impact.' Three findings significant to the professional impact were identified: (1) career development; (2) application of skills; and (3) confidence. With regard to the personal impact of the programme, the themes identified were: (1) increased confidence; (2)

increase in awareness through reflection and (3) role of values. These findings are summarised under 'Personal Impact.'

Reasons for Applying

The survey participants' reasons for applying for the programme were categorised under five specific themes. Therefore, specific quotes are referenced to enable the reader to comprehend the reasons. The key thematic reason, which emerged is (1) Career development. Participants wished to progress in their career. For example, a comment included, 'I also wanted to undertake some professional development in an area that was of interest to me. I felt, at the time, that a master's would improve my chances of promotion within the school', as well as open up opportunities for change of career in the future 'I also thought it would give me an option down the line if I wanted to get out of the classroom.' A second reason for applying for the programme was (2) To obtain a formal qualification. One participant said 'I always wanted to attain a Masters Degree in education.' Another thematic reason that emerged was:

(3) The further understanding of education and technology. While the programme content appealed to many participants, their desire to enhance their understanding of learning and technology emerged, as a participant explained: 'I wanted to focus on learning about how I teach and the theoretical background to teaching and learning.' A fourth reason is (4) To upskill. Participants viewed the programme as an opportunity to gain new skills to enhance their workplace: 'I was interested in developing my technological skills to improve my skillset for the education sector in the 21st century.' The fifth reason included (5) Personal development. For example, participants expressed aspirations to achieve personal goals and challenge themselves: 'I am passionate about lifelong learning and wanted to prove to myself I could rise to the challenge of studying on a Masters programme in my 40's.'

A common theme among reasons for applying for the programme was the desire for career progression. A number of respondents stated that by acquiring a level 9 qualification (Master's degree), they hoped it would open up more career opportunities in the future, for example, 'Personal fulfilment and to increase my chances of acquiring a leadership role in my school.'

Professional Impact

The second part of the survey aimed to assess and evaluate the professional impact of the programme. 90% of alumni confirmed that the programme had an impact on their professional role. Areas of the programme, which have proven useful in their careers, include the eLearning component whereby participants are exposed to and utilise collaborative online environments, multimedia and the creation of online learning resources. The understanding and analysis of theory, such as, management, pedagogy, learning styles and instructional design, was also considered to be significant as respondents stated that they apply such theories in their current work contexts. The reflective framework of the programme was mentioned as highly valuable, as participants stated how they are more conscious of improving their practice and the role of reflection in this process.

Career Development

66% of people have changed jobs since completing the programme. The remainder 34%, while remaining in a similar role or position, highlighted the extra responsibilities and involvement in workplace projects since completing the MSc:

In an official sense my job in school is still the same...So, while my job is officially unchanged it has unofficially changed in many ways. I run the student council, I co-created and now run the school website and I am the Erasmus+ coordinator in the school... Certainly my role in running the school website is a direct result of my participation in the eLearning MSc.

However, the most outstanding pattern that emerged from this category was that of career progression as a direct result of obtaining the qualification. This is evident in the sample of answers taken from the online survey related to the question: Has the MSc had an impact on your professional role?

I was offered a new post within my hospital based on my achievements as CPD Officer. I attribute a large part of my success as CPD Officer to the Masters programme.

I now work in education, specifically involving eLearning and Multimedia.

This is as a direct result of completing the Masters. It opened my eyes to other possibilities and directions for me to go in my career.

As part of career progression, participants attributed work promotions to the MSc;

Completing the MSc programme gave me a key advantage in comparison with other candidates when applying for various promotions within my organisation.

Another participant stated:

I have changed employers and am now employed at a more senior level with the new company.

Application of Skills

Alumni also stated that they are practically applying various skills developed on the programme to their place of work. This includes digital, reflective and research skills; all of which are enhancing the workplace:

I have used the skills I learned from the programme in my own classrooms. I have increased the use of video in the classroom to supplement other tools I use such as PowerPoint presentations, discussions, research etc.

I now develop any e-learning that I require myself, instead of having to hand over to a vendor or other team member. I'm also more willing to try new technologies-the "fear factor" was greatly reduced by my participation on this programme.

These responses highlight the application of skills acquired on the programme to the participants' workplace. There is evidence that participants are actively creating multimedia resources to improve the learning environment in their workplace, as well as enhancing workplace communication through better understanding of co-workers.

Confidence

Another theme identified included increase in confidence as participants describe their increased ability to work effectively and contribute to workplace discussions and policy making:

I am now working in an area that I love and am passionate about. The masters helped me realise what my passions were. It has also given me the confidence to pursue other interests professionally.

The programme gave me more confidence to engage with my colleagues in relation to the required changes in our practice. The programme provided me with a lot of ideas and changed the way that I reflect on my own practice.

It is clear from the survey that the skills, knowledge and successes as a result of their participation on the MSc have impacted positively on alumni's professional lives. However,

one respondent noted that they have been unable to utilise skills acquired on the programme to impact the workplace due to external factors such as current education system restrictions.

Personal Impact

Dadds (2014) asserts that it is important to acknowledge how personal growth is embedded in professional development and the complex relationship between knowledge and agency. 96% of graduates said that the programme has enabled them to develop on a personal level. Three significant themes related to personal development were identified: (1) increased confidence; (2) increased awareness through reflection; and (3) role of values.

Increased Confidence

The most prominent theme emerging from the personal impact of the programme was the sense of confidence and self-belief. Participants described their confidence in newly acquired skills and the transformative effect on their own attitudes:

I feel more confident in the job I do today. I am also not afraid to make a mistake, which before the programme, this was something I dreaded.

It was a life changing experience for me. It reawakened my creative abilities and helped me to believe in myself and become a more confident person.

There was a sense that participants were challenged to move beyond their comfort zone with a view to tap into their potential or otherwise hidden talents:

The personal development and growth that happens during the programme is very powerful. The fact that it ignites new interests is brilliant. Forcing yourself to do something outside your comfort zone, while scary and risky, is ultimately exhilarating.

I have gained considerable confidence and discovered that I have a considerable skill set that was previously untapped. I have learned my value in the workplace.

It also has given me confidence in my opinions and in my ability to take on new challenges, move outside my comfort zone and succeed.

Increased Awareness through Reflection

An important finding of the study highlights the level of self-reflection and understanding as a consequence of the reflective framework underpinning the programme. 84% of alumni agreed that the process of reflective journaling was beneficial for them. 77% said that they had no prior experience of reflective journaling prior to participating on the programme. Alumni noted that they were challenged to think critically about past events:

Again I think the course has helped me to be more reflective and taught me to think through why things have happened - in the past I may have been dismissive of events. My mindset is definitely one of growth and seeing the opportunity even in things that are difficult to deal with.

As well as develop an appreciation of their own knowledge and experiences and thereby acknowledge the role that they play in their own learning process:

I'm more self-reflective and have more trust in my own personal experience and value it rather than accepting other peoples' experiences as the norm.

This demonstrates the level of personal learning and self-awareness that emerged from participation. Participants have experienced changes in their mindsets, which have made them more reflective in their endeavors and have thus contributed to their personal growth.

There is further evidence to suggest that the MSc journey is one of growth and discovery, as one participant explicitly stated how their own well-being has improved as a

result of self evaluation, 'As I worked my way through the programme and as an outcome of my dissertation, I realised that it was important for me to make time for myself and my own development (regardless of work environment). I have taken greater care to do this since I completed the programme.'

Role of Values

A further pertinent theme is the role of values, as alumni referred to how they were challenged to critically think about their values.

Being challenged to identify and name your values was a very thought-provoking exercise. It brought up a huge amount of unexpected emotions for me when I began to explore why I held the values I did. This was ultimately very beneficial to me personally.

The values based aspect of the dissertation was quite personal and challenged me to consider these in both my professional and personal life and has led to a greater understanding of their role. I think the reflective aspect too is something that I have maintained.

All alumni who participated in this study stated how they changed, either personally or professionally, due to their participation in the programme. From a professional perspective, alumni felt empowered and equipped to improve their workplace situations. From a personal perspective, they described the role that a supportive learning environment played in facilitating growth and transformation.

The contribution of the MSc.

A central part of the programme is its focus on action research. Tosey and Marshall (2017) warn that, "an increasing conformity to mainstream research and knowledge can result in a discounting of the legitimacy of certain types of research (e.g. action research) as well as

types of knowledge (e.g. emergent, practical knowledge)” (p. 400). The findings from this study highlights the professional growth of participants as to skills gained and workplace competencies developed, it is also important to consider the changes, if any, that were brought to their workplace as a result.

67% of respondents described how their participation in the programme enabled them to bring about change in their workplace and improve their practice. These changes varied from the introduction of new projects to enhance learning to becoming leaders of change by contributing knowledge to ICT planning and workplace policies.

As an example, one respondent told how they introduced a challenging programme in a primary school. ‘Since the programme, I have started a High Achieving maths programme for senior students as well as the introduction of iPads. These two major changes are due to experiences and new learning I gained directly from my time in the programme.’ A number of responses also point to the championing role that alumnus have played in introducing online learning courses and professional development programmes in their workplace, for example, ‘It has prompted me to set up a professional development programme in the school aimed at introducing teachers to different methods of teaching,’ as well as integrating the use of technology and online learning environments into the workplace. Another alumni referred to the ‘hugely increased web presence and use of e-learning tools organisation-wide.’ And another, ‘I have introduced moodle to my new organisation also and is still running to this day.’ It is also important to note their confidence in contributing to policies and ICT planning in their workplace as a direct result of their experience on the programme, ‘I have been involved in our schools ICT planning and development since embarking on the Masters. I do feel it has helped me bring about change because I felt empowered after the Masters to share my knowledge of the role ICT has in schools, not as a stand-alone subject but rather how it can aid the teaching of various subjects.’

Although the evidence so far shows the increased confidence and personal growth of alumni, it is also fairly important to analyse the learning environment, which facilitated this process, as quoted in the survey. Noteworthy from the responses was the acknowledgement of the safe and supportive learning environment that was fostered on the programme, which enabled participants to take risks and gain self-belief through their endeavours.

Conclusion

The online survey results provided insights into the reasons that professionals choose to pursue a continuing education programme such as the MSc. It shows the level of professional and personal growth, which alumni gained through their engagement with programme content and their application of skills and learning to changing or improving their own workplace situation. Alumni noted that they were challenged to think critically about past events, and they highlighted the level of personal learning and self-awareness as a result of participating in the programme. They stated that they experienced changes in their mindsets, which have made them more reflective in their endeavors and contributed to their personal growth. The reflective framework and action research approach was highlighted, as alumni declared that they are more conscious of improving their practice and the role of reflection in the process.

The findings indicate that the learning on the programme enabled participants to effect change in their organisation and contrary to Trumper and Eldar's (2014) study participants in the MSc were able to apply new ideas acquired to their workplace. Findings indicate that learning on the MSc is not isolated or removed from socio-cultural contexts - quite the opposite. It is evident that the skills and understanding that the inquiry based pedagogies promoted are needed more than ever in an increasingly complex, unpredictable, and fractious world characterized by 'wicked' problems (Tosey and Marshall, 2017).

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