A well-managed learning contract process can significantly contribute to supervisory development.

Supervisory Training and Development: The Use of Learning Contracts

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A review of the literature on learning contracts [2,3,4,5] indicates that a learning contract consists of at least four key interrelated components: objectives, learning plans, implementation, and evaluation.

In late 1989, the organization initiated the design, construction and delivery of an innovative two-year Supervisory Development Programme. The programme design had to address problems related to mature and experienced learners, an apathy or perhaps a hostility to training and development as well as significant learning transfer problems. These barriers had to be overcome in order to deliver changes and improvements in the workplace and demonstrate the value of training and development activities to the organization as a whole.

The programme involved 52 supervisors and their seven managers in the production and maintenance division. The supervisor group included craft, general and process supervisors working regular days as well as shift work.

The basic purpose of this article is to examine and analyse the concept of a learning contract in general and to investigate the contribution of learning contracts to supervisory development within the context of the organization studied.

Seymour’s contention that training and development is about changing people’s behaviour at work [1] is relevant, as a major problem involved in many supervisory training and development programmes is the issue of transfer and application of learning to different workplace situations. The degree of learning transfer and application is a major determinant of the effectiveness of training and development and of its contribution to improved performance within the organization.

This was recognized as being an important area to be addressed prior to the commencement of the programme. In order to focus on and effectively deal with this problem, the authors, in conjunction with the training department, designed and implemented a learning contract system for operation on the Supervisory Development Programme.

An integral part of this learning contract approach was an element of self-direction, where a climate is created to encourage the trainees to take responsibility for their own learning and also to apply this learning through activities back in the workplace.

This article is structured in the following way:
- First, we review the concept of contract learning.
- Second, we describe the operation of learning contracts including findings from interviews with a sample of those who took part in the development programme.
- Third, we present a set of conclusions and recommendations on the working of learning contracts in organizations.

Learning Contracts Defined
A review of the literature on learning contracts [2,3,4,5] indicates that a learning contract consists of at least four key interrelated components: objectives, learning plans, implementation and evaluation.

Introduction
The promotion of continuous learning activities in an organization is a significant challenge facing any training and development function. This challenge is often all the more difficult when the focus is on supervisors. Supervisors often react in a negative way to training and development activities and perceive them as theoretical, abstract situations having no application to day-to-day problems. The organization, details of which form the basis of this article, tried to get around this fundamental problem by utilizing learning contracts. The organization itself (LAD International) is a very large chemical organization employing over 700 employees and operating in a highly competitive market. The culture is very power oriented (using Handy’s terms) and all craft and operational grades are unionized.
There are variations in the literature[3,5] on the above components. Needs analysis and resources are sometimes separated out as key components, but this is largely a matter of emphasis as the four components listed above implicitly cater for needs analysis and resources.

Basically, a learning contract is a written agreement between a manager, his or her trainee and a trainer/tutor detailing what the trainee is going to learn, how they are going to learn and where applicable how they are going to apply their learning in the workplace. Simply defined, it is “a means for helping learners structure learning projects systematically - for involving them actively in planning their own learning”[2].

For the purpose of the Supervisory Development Programme, a learning contract was defined as a written agreement between a supervisor, his/her manager and a trainer detailing: what is going to be learned; how the learning is going to be applied at the workplace; details of evaluation and progress review. The authors designed a model for use on the Supervisory Development Programme at LAD (see Figure 1).

The learning contract model was used to solve key problems previously encountered on development programmes and specifically supervisory training and development programmes within the organization. The basic philosophy underpinning the learning contract model was that, where a supervisor agreed that a development need was relevant to his/her role and where he/she was given a substantial and meaningful input at all stages, he/she would take ownership and responsibility for his/her development and be committed to its application within the workplace.

A further integral part of the philosophy was that the manager would be involved in a facilitative and supportive role. The major thrust of this model was to accomplish behavioural change in the workplace through an involved, self-motivated and self-directed trainee.

Typical problems which the learning contract model hoped to address included:

1. Role conflict, overload and ambiguity. This problem frequently arose during training programmes where the role (or some specific aspect of it) was not accepted by the supervisor. There was no change as a result of the training.
2. The “OK in theory but will it work in practice?” attitude. Supervisors often view theory as being within the realm of academics who do not operate in the real world.
3. Supervisors often feel that they did not need development. They knew enough to do their job. A supervisor in this situation is not open to learning, is defensive in a learning situation and feels it’s a waste of his/her valuable time.
4. Some supervisors find it difficult to generate ways of applying their learning while others are averse to risk taking.
5. Managers were not directly involved and therefore were not in a position to give sufficient support and feedback to the supervisor.

The above and other similar problems became barriers to learning transfer and reduced training effectiveness. The learning contract approach tries to address these problems and enhance learning transfer and effectiveness.

Key Principles of Contract Learning

The learning contract itself is a developmental tool for the trainee. Prideaux and Ford[6] suggest that it challenges the learner’s ability to be self-directing and to set and work to appropriate objectives. The ideas underpinning contract learning are consistent with Knowles’ findings on how adults learn most effectively[7] and with Mumford’s contention that a manager’s day-to-day
activities and experiences should be the primary focus for improving his/her performance[8].

Other principles underpinning the notion of learning contracts are as follows:

- Trainees will learn more effectively because learning-centred involvement will make them more likely to be committed and motivated to learn[7].
- Trainees are provided with the opportunity to work towards satisfying their own development needs within the organizational context[7].
- The learner-centred approach of the learning contract implies a willingness on behalf of the trainee to take responsibility for his/her own learning and its application at the workplace[9].
- In order to create a climate where the trainee takes on those responsibilities it is necessary for the trainer to modify his/her role from instructor or teacher to that of facilitator[6] and become a resource to both the trainee and his/her manager.
- Managing the learning climate to facilitate a learning-centred approach involves removing or neutralizing the internal (personal) and external (work environment) barriers to learning[10].
- Learning contracts are comprised of sequential steps that inherently involve a review by the trainee of the process as well as the content of the learning. Gold[11] found this to have significant benefits – not only did it review past activities but also “it plays a potent part in the build-up of understanding that allows a person qualitatively to enhance the planning of future actions”.
- Learning contracts are based on real organizational problems in a specific workplace context.
- Through the application of learning trainees can see positive results from their efforts[5]. This sense of achievement tends to be a further motivator for learning and improvement.
- Qualitative as well as quantitative objectives can be successfully catered for in a learning contract[12].

This overall approach to development is indeed a process of striving to achieve excellent, high quality training, which is cost effective, resulting in the achievement of the desired behavioural changes and enhanced performance-related results that are an organizational priority.

Contract Learning in Practice – The LAD Experience

The organization has a business-focused approach to development. This approach combines individual learning with the organization’s needs ensuring that LAD has a competent and qualified staff to carry out the day-to-day business. This is a cost-effective approach designed to achieve LAD’s current and strategic objectives. It facilitates individual personal development within the context of organizational needs. Dodge[13] supports this approach and views it as a basis for good development.

Mission of Training and Development Department

The training and development department mission is to provide a quality service to line managers, thereby enabling the organization to safely and harmoniously produce quality alumina at the lowest possible cost, consistent with production goals. This is a customer-focused approach. The other key stakeholders are employees, management, community and shareholders. Focusing on the customer as a key stakeholder, management create a climate where employees develop and contribute to their full potential. The company carries out its business as an open, responsible corporate citizen and maximizes the return to the shareholders. The training and development function aims to develop its staff so as to give LAD a competitive edge in the marketplace and is the key to its survival and future prosperity, to the benefit of all shareholders.

The training department’s focus is on results and the primary objective is to change behaviour and, through this behavioural change, to develop appropriate attitudes and values.

Using Harrison’s[10] framework, the training and development function achieves its business-focused approach through the following process:

- The establishment of informal collaborative relationships with key stakeholders in the organization.
- An emphasis on ensuring that top management understand the key training and development issues and are committed to action.
- Systematic data-gathering and planning on a collaborative basis with line management and other parties.
- A conscious attempt to link employee development policy and plans to business strategy.
- To ensure that the function is fully informed about the business and taking action on any people-related changes.
- Collaboration with management to ensure ongoing monitoring and feedback of results and the need for action on those results.
The Supervisory Development Programme

The operation of the learning contract on the Supervisory Development Programme can be broken down into three distinct phases.

Phase 1. Needs Analysis and Objectives

The overall aim of the Supervisory Development Programme was:

To improve the knowledge and skill of first-line management to ensure that we are achieving, in a harmonious manner, a perceptible increase in overall employee commitment leading to measurable improvement in quality, safety, productivity and costs.

The aim was derived from the strategic corporate objectives and the business objectives and was discussed and agreed with the supervisors and their managers. The initial need for the programme was highlighted by the supervisors and their managers, coupled with the needs arising from the strategic plan. The need became apparent through general feedback by supervisors and managers on the training and development implications of problems and issues that were occurring in the organization. The performance appraisal system was a further communications channel of development needs. The developmental and change implications of the strategic plan signalled other future needs. The programme was supported by senior management and the managing director through tangible contributions. Components of the programme are outlined in Figure 2.

The role of the supervisor. Unlike most learning contracts that start with developing lists of training needs[1], LAD's learning contract started with a review of the role of the supervisor. The entire first workshop concentrated on the role of the supervisor and his/her training needs. The aim was to ensure that the Supervisory Development Programme was directed towards helping supervisors perform their real-life roles as effectively as possible. A learning contract was put in operation for this particular workshop (The Role of the Supervisor) and it started with specifying the developmental objectives.

Prior to the start of this workshop, discussion took place with the supervisors, their managers and the plant manager in order to agree the objectives. These sessions helped to establish realistic expectations for the programme and, as Wehrenberg[14] suggested, they also prepared participants for a positive experience and reduced any anxiety they may have felt about participating on the programme.

Manager involvement. The 52 supervisors attended training in five groups. A key concept agreed at this stage was that two managers would sponsor each workshop. This meant that two specific managers attended the first session of each workshop and they each attended alternatively on the other four sessions. The remaining five managers maintained continuity throughout the sessions, represented the absent managers and resolved problems and issues as they arose. Their involvement as Seymour[15] found was a positive indicator of commitment from the start.

Development and delivery. Following agreement on the objectives the next task was to decide on and agree the content and delivery methods of the training. The agreed approach was in keeping with the self-directed learning contract concept in that the programme facilitated maximum involvement from all participants. The aim was to keep the content practical and relevant to the day-to-day business. This approach encouraged participants to share their experience and learning for the benefit of all.

The training methods consisted mainly of group work, role plays, discussions, LAD case studies, and hands-on assignments and were chosen to facilitate self-directed adult learning. This approach is supported by Knowles[7] who found that adults as learners have:

- a deep psychological need to be self-directing;
- a valuable resource of previous experience and learning;
Contract initiation. The contract initiation was discussion based and was designed to address at the earliest possible stage the learning transfer problems. The discussion took place between the manager and the supervisor and was centred around the supervisor's training and development needs, the specific training and development objectives and the manager's supporting role. The manager explained the intent of the workshop, the material it contained and the logistics and methods of delivery.

The participants' objectives were agreed and documented on a specifically designed form and were signed by the manager and supervisor. There was also a discussion on the possible applications of the learning on return to the workplace. The result was a committed participant who was aware of what was expected in his/her workplace role. Wehrenberg[14] has found this approach to be a learning motivator and an aid to learning transfer between the learning situation and the job.

The major objective at this stage is the agreement of learning objectives and a conscious effort has to be made to maintain the distinction between learning objectives and action-oriented tasks. Indeed, Boak and Mac-Stephenson[4] found it typical of participants and their bosses to confuse contracts with projects or work objectives.

While a project may be part of a learning contract, care must be taken that the project objectives do not become blurred with the learning objectives at the expense of learning opportunities.

In exceptional cases where this agreement could not be achieved between the manager and supervisor a third party such as the trainer facilitated the parties reaching agreement. The trainer also has a role in initially briefing the managers and also clarifying or elaborating on issues that may arise during the paired discussions.

Prework. The discussion ended with the issuing of prework to the participants by the manager (the manager also carried out prework). On the programme, prework was generally perceived to be an excellent form of preparation for each workshop.

As part of their prework in the intervening period (two weeks) between the agreeing of the contract and attendance at the course the participants were asked to:

- reflect on the activities you carry out in the course of your normal day’s work and categorize them into particular elements of your role. Could you also note the individual items that cause you most problems each day/shift (an item may rate differently on different days). I suggest you make a note of this information on a daily basis and bring it along to the course as it will be useful for group work.

The focus of the prework was once again on the supervisor's experience and the reality of his/her day-to-day tasks. It is congruent with him/her taking responsibility for his/her own learning and the improvement of his/her performance. Mumford has found that the integration of training interventions with day-to-day experience optimizes learning transfer and, hence, performance[8].

This completed the first phase of the learning contract.

Phase 2. Training Implementation and Application

The first workshop on the Role of the Supervisor was an off-site residential workshop. The workshop was run on five consecutive weekends to cover all the managers and supervisors. It was opened by the managing director and the plant manager. Their interest and tangible commitment proved to be a valuable motivator for the participants.

Teamwork. Following the general introduction the group was broken into two teams consisting of six per team. The teams were selected to give a cross-section of skills, age/experience and background in order to promote cross-fertilization throughout the whole plant. The teams worked in syndicate rooms and reported back to the plenary sessions. The first team task was a discussion on each individual's learning contract and objectives. The team's common learning objective as well as individual "extra" learning objectives were presented at the plenary sessions.

These teams had an important part to play in the learning process as they continued to share experience and support each other back at the plant.

Prideaux and Ford[5] have found synergistic benefits in this approach and it is similar to Smith's concept of the mutual monitoring of projects[10] in that it creates an ongoing learning team. Some form of mutual support is vital to the self-directed learning process and Knowles has found that some form of networking achieves this[9].

Workshop content and delivery. It is necessary to comment briefly on the content and delivery insofar as it impacted on the self-directed learning process.

The role of the supervisor was defined by the teams through syndicate work combined with lecturers on theory and policy by the training facilitators. The managers intermingled with the teams and made contributions only on demand from the teams. That
contribution was mainly in the “clarification” and “opinion” area. The work was mainly carried out by listing the supervisor’s individual accountabilities and responsibilities followed by detailing how he/she fulfils them. This involved an analysis of what activities he/she carried out on a daily, weekly, monthly and annual basis. Further elements of this process involved examining the importance of different responsibilities and activities and the amount of time spent on them. The teams worked on one or two responsibilities in syndicate for approximately 40 minutes and reported back to the plenary session where issues were teased out, clarified and agreed on.

This approach ensured that the theoretical issues or another management topic that arose, such as leadership, counselling, handling conflicts, etc. was dealt with in the context of an ongoing work-based responsibility or activity. The key point is that it made the theory and learning relevant and removed the “pie-in-the-sky” defence barrier frequently erected by supervisors. There is a further benefit in that it “grounds” the learning in a tangible workplace, hence aiding retention and recall. Loewenthal’s view on problem-based learning material concurs with this[15]. Training needs. On the final day, after the supervisor’s role was established, the teams undertook the task of establishing the supervisor’s training needs based on the knowledge and experience of the preceding days’ work. Once again, the managers and training personnel facilitated as necessary and the plenary session established a complete list of the supervisors’ training needs for the next two years. They then prioritized this list. This meant that they had defined the content of their development programmes for the next two years. This established participant ownership of the programme with all the ensuing benefits. Furthermore, it ensured relevance; Boak and Mac Stephenson quote Landin as arguing:

What better way to ensure relevance than to give the student who will go through the programme a strong hand in designing it?[4].

Applications. If we view the contract discussion and prework as the bridge from the workplace to the training situation then we can treat the applications as the bridge that is critical in transferring the learning back to the workplace.

One of the last team tasks is to establish, through discussion, four or five key workplace applications of their learning. The team presents the applications in plenary session and a final list of about ten is compiled.

Each participant gets a copy of the possible applications for use in phase 3 of the learning contract in conjunction with his/her manager.

Learning points. Each team was required to prepare a presentation of the key aspects of the workshop. Each team selected different aspects. This final presentation included a summary of any barriers to effective supervision that had remained unresolved.

The presentations were made in plenary session to the plant manager and other managers who attended on the final afternoon. The presentations gave them a flavour of what had been learned and achieved and what would be done as a result of that training experience. The presentations were followed by a response from the plant manager and a discussion/question and answer period.

The final exercise gave an organizational imprimatur to what the trainees had undertaken. It was a source of reassurance and confidence for the participants who would be taking some risks in applying their learning. Furthermore, the involvement of senior management in the process ensured congruence and closed the strategic loop back to the corporate objectives and business plan.

Phase 3. Training Applications and Evaluation

This phase took the organization into what Boak and Mac Stephenson[3] describe as:

Aessment – what the participant will produce as evidence that the contract has been completed successfully.

At LAD, this phase was reached when the learning had been effectively applied in the workplace to produce enhanced performance and results.

Some pertinent questions at this stage were:

- Were there other unexpected results?
- What else could/may impact on the results?

Post-training discussion. On returning to work, the participant met with his/her manager to discuss the learning experience and to review progress to date.

The supervisor described and explained the possible applications from the workshop. They both agreed the most relevant applications (typically two or three), balancing the organizational needs with the supervisor’s personal development needs. Applications not already on the list could be agreed as suitable. It was vitally important that the applications and the number of them selected were agreed as suitable. It was vitally important that the applications and the number of them selected were realistic but challenging for the individual[4].
The necessary resources to carry out the applications were agreed and an evaluation procedure was established.

The evidence and criteria for judging completion of applications were agreed at this stage. This evidence, as Smith[16] also suggests, should include standards. It was also important to forecast the critical roles or milestones along the path and to agree either review dates or a review schedule in advance.

**Reviews.** The ongoing interest and support of the manager was vital at this early implementation stage. The supervisor was now once again back in the workplace.

It was important that all involved in and affected by the applications were made fully aware of what was taking place, especially members of the supervisor's team and also his/her colleagues.

The reviews were to take place at the agreed times and any revision to applications or criteria were made only where necessary, and then promptly.

This phase of the learning contract also addressed individual supervisors' training needs that were not catered for as part of the programme of the entire group. Furthermore, it addressed any problems that arose where a supervisor's individual objectives were not achieved. Specific training was implemented to cater for these needs, although it was infrequent.

Supporting the learning contract approach, the use of a learning contract as a framework for changing employees' behaviour at work can best be supported through an open and frank performance appraisal system with two-way feedback. The appraisal system should be ongoing throughout the year with a summary appraisal on an annual basis. This approach ensures that it becomes part of the organization's culture.

**Evaluation of the Process**

In the sense that the authors were co-ordinating the programme and facilitating on the workshops, the evaluation was an ongoing process. The phases of the evaluation were:

1. Ongoing analysis over the two years including many discussions on a one-to-one basis with managers and supervisors.
2. Discussions with individuals outside the plant division on whose departments the performance of the supervisors and their teams would have had an impact.
3. A number of the workshops contained a slot where each supervisor reported back to the group on the progress to date of the applications detailing how he/she achieved his/her objectives and where he/she had encountered particular difficulties or highlights. This presentation was prepared by the supervisor prior to attending the workshop and in itself became a motive to succeed. It was also a valuable learning experience for his/her fellow participants. With a few exceptions the reporting was accurate.

**Key Evaluation Findings**

**Attitude to the Learning Contract**

The introduction of the learning contract was a new experience for all of the supervisors. At the start, many of them were apprehensive and sceptical about its use and they looked on it as more paperwork. Following a thorough induction to the concept their attitudes changed, to the extent that almost all of the participants felt it was of benefit to them by the time they were attending the programme.

**Awareness of Objectives**

All of the participants found that being aware of their objectives in attending a workshop reduced their apprehension prior to attending a programme. It removed the “hidden agenda” issue that is frequently a training barrier, and they found they were more relaxed and got involved from the very start of the workshop.

**Discussion with the Manager**

The opportunity to discuss their training objectives with the manager was perceived as significant by all participants. The fact that the manager dedicated time to each individual prior to his/her attendance on a workshop significantly increased the importance and profile of the event. This was also very obvious on the programme itself – on occasions, when managers did not fulfil the contract or hold the discussion, their supervisors complained bitterly to the trainers and to their colleagues.

This discussion achieved other objectives in so far as it got a manager and supervisor to discuss together issues other than day-to-day production problems. This discussion was a key part of the contract – the higher the quality of the discussion, the more positive was the attitude to training. The managers with the better human relations and communications skills obtained the most from these discussions, as did their supervisors. The discussion became much more than an orientation to the programme.
Written Objectives
A significant number of the supervisors believed that writing down their objectives made them concentrate more on the upcoming training and development activity. All of them found that it ensured that they did not forget some of their objectives.

They also believed that writing objectives down increased their chances of achieving them. All participants asked more questions and required more information about each workshop when they became aware that they were obliged to formulate and write down objectives. As a result of this they believed that they knew more about the training workshop prior to attending than would normally be the case.

Learner-centred Nature of the Programme
The supervisors believed that they had more control over what they learned. They referred to the fact that the initial needs analysis was largely their work and also that the majority of the learning objectives and applications were formulated and selected either by them or with their consent. As a result of this they believed that they knew more about the training workshop prior to attending than would normally be the case.

Relevance of the Programme
The supervisors believed that, by being involved, they ensured that the programme was directed at the “real world” and that the time and effort they invested in the training would be of benefit to them and improve their performance in the workplace. This is an important perception in terms of motivation.

They frequently mentioned that they could (and often did) link what was happening during the training to aspects or problems of their own job. (Some actually brought “live” problems with them for role play and case studies and went back and applied the best solution that the exercise had produced.) They believed that they could be confronted at any time in the workplace with the types of problems, topics and issues that they had considered on the programme.

Prework
There was a mixed reaction to prework. Supervisors believed it contributed significantly to preparing them for training by exposing them to some of the issues and, thus making them think through things in advance. Others felt that they did not have time for doing prework on the job and had to take it home in order to complete it. The most preferred type of prework was a one-page summary of an issue in a points format and “straightforward” questionnaires; longer articles of “heavy reading” were not perceived as useful.

Delivery Format
Participants were quite surprised to find that they were not going to be lectured at or be told the “right” way to do things. They were just about settled into their seats when they found that they were on the move again in their syndicate teams. They had a task to complete, with a given time-frame, with minimum direction and what they felt to be very little information or guidance.

Participants found this very disconcerting. They were under pressure to produce a quality result that would be presented to the other team members, managers and training facilitators. They were annoyed by what they perceived as the “lack of co-operation” from the training facilitators. The training facilitators, on entering a syndicate room, would typically be asked a number of questions. The only replies given would be in relation to clarifying the task. All the questions would be sensitively turned back to the group, where a huge bank of knowledge existed (a typical group of supervisors would have up to 100 years of cumulative supervisory experience).

By the end of the first workshop the participants were strong advocates of this learner-centred approach and could see that it was part of the overall involvement strategy.

They all found that it increased their group behaviour skills, improved their discussion-leading abilities, and improved time management skills, gave them insights into team style behaviour and also improved presentation skills. Six per cent did not like or want to do the presentations but did it anyway because they were part of the team.

Selecting Applications
All participants found this to be a useful and synergistic exercise. After attending other training programmes it had always been a problem to try to figure out ways of applying the new skills or knowledge. The team exercise eliminated this problem and gave participants a selection of applications that were selected by themselves and which, therefore, could be put in place in the “real world” without experiencing major problems.

Post-training Discussion
The process of reporting and discussing the training event with the participant’s manager was found to be a useful means of reflecting on what they had learned.
Their explanations of the typical applications puts the training into context once again in the workplace.

All participants found that selecting and documenting applications in conjunction with their manager brought things out into the open where there was a commitment from the manager and the supervisor. The process was seen as a mutual effort in which both contribute – the manager through resources, if applicable, and, very importantly, ongoing genuine interest and support.

Review Processes
The review process was perceived as vital to the success of the application by all concerned. It gives both parties an opportunity to validate success or to deal with problems that have arisen. Frequently the supervisor would initiate a review earlier than planned if he/she came across unforeseen obstacles to progress or other problems.

This is significant in that, in most cases, the supervisors were initiating an early review to get agreement on an alternative solution formulated by them rather than dumping problems on the manager’s lap and feeling comfortable now that they had an excuse not to proceed.

The review worked best where the climate was supportive rather than blameful. Where it was blameful there was a minimalist, low-risk approach by the supervisor to his/her applications. There was also a strong feeling that the participant should be getting more out of this leading to some resentment. The most impressive results were achieved by managers where the review climate was supportive while maintaining high standards and achieving realistic targets.

Closing the Loop – Performance Appraisal
The majority of supervisors believed that there were benefits in incorporating the training applications and needs into the performance appraisal. Of more concern to them was the appraisal process itself and how it was carried out. They all believed that two-way communication was the best and most useful form of appraisal and also that it should be objective and achievement oriented. This is congruent with the learning contract approach.

Implications of Learning Contracts for Training and Development
The literature review and the empirical research illustrate that a learning contract can significantly contribute to supervisory development within a highly centralized organization. Its approach is learner centred in that it facilitates the trainee becoming directly involved in the planning, delivery and application of the learning. This involvement generates commitment and allows the trainee to take responsibility for his/her own learning.

Adults learn most effectively through an involved self-motivated and self-directed approach[4]. The learning contract is a suitable medium for putting the approach into practice. The transfer of this learning is optimized by its integration with the day-to-day activities and experience of trainees. The learning contract ensures that the training is relevant by involving the trainee at the earliest possible stage of role review and needs analysis.

The empirical research illustrates that relevance is also a key issue when it comes to applying the learning at the workplace, as the trainee must return and apply his/her learning in the reality of today.

Specific implications can also be identified as follows.

Induction. A thorough induction to the learning contract process is vital for all involved in order to promote understanding and minimize resistance. An open collaborative atmosphere between the manager and the trainee is also important to maximize the benefits from the learning contract. This relationship issue, as well as the “people” skills of the manager, have a significant impact on the supervisor’s attitude to training and his/her motivation to apply that training.

Preparation. The learning contract process fulfills a “fertilizing the ground” role in that the supervisor is better prepared and more open to learning.

Linking. Linking new knowledge and skills to activities in the workplace optimizes learning transfer. The learning contract aids this linking process by providing “bridges to and from the workplace”.

Supporting the learning contract learning climate. A learning contract is most effective where it is operated in a facilitative climate and supported by a suitable framework. The attitude of the manager and his/her active involvement through the discussion process are key determinants in fulfilling the contract.

Teamwork. Peer group discussion, commitment and support is a considerable source of strength for each participant. This was apparent both in the teams on the course and the teams back at the workplace.

The group dynamics generate a greater number of enhanced ideas through a synergistic process. The group discussion creates a reflective situation for the individuals that aids the completion of the learning cycle, particularly at the application stage.
The fact that other supervisors are implementing the same or similar applications is a comfort for all as they are not taking risks in isolation. The review of how different approaches worked is a further learning experience.

Training delivery. A challenging learner-centred environment, where participants learn through involvement in a self-convincing process, is most congruent with a learning contract approach.

Review. Follow-up through review sessions is vital to the successful implementation of learning applications. The review process should be supportive and the loop should eventually be closed back into an effective performance appraisal system.

Learning contracts can be successfully introduced in an organization which is traditional and has a course-based approach to training and development. At LAD, the learning contract process helped to capitalize on learning opportunities within the workplace and promote the notion of learning as a continuous process inherent to all organizations.

References