COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE AND APPRENTICE MOTIVATION: AN INTERPRETIVIST EXPLORATION OF SITUATED LEARNING AND ITS EFFECT ON LEARNER PERSISTENCE

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Abstract

The number of learners on degree apprenticeship programmes has been increasing each year since they were introduced in 2015. The problem is a high attrition rate, especially in management apprenticeships. This is bad for learners, their employers, universities and UK productivity. However, success rates are good, as around 98% of apprentices that complete their programme of study achieve the qualification. In other words, most of those that complete their apprenticeship, pass their apprenticeship.

This case study explores the experiences and the perceptions of chartered manager degree apprentices (CMDA) at the University of Gloucestershire, to understand the influences that enhanced or diminished their motivation to persist. Community of practice theory provided the theoretical foundation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This well-established socio-cultural learning theory takes as its focus the relationship between learning and the social situations and interactions in which it takes place, therefore it provided a lens through which to compare its principles and characteristics with current practice. The philosophical approach chosen was interpretivism, with a research design that included semi structured interviews with learners at different stages of the CMDA programme, then with their employers and University staff, to achieve triangulation.

Comparing community of practice theory to current practice revealed weaknesses that adversely affected the learning experience. Critically, the relationship between the University and its employer partners was transactional, rather than collaborative, resulting in some key managers in the workplace being unaware of their roles and responsibilities to learners. For most apprentices, this led to the absence of a supportive learning foundation and environment, creating problems which many battled to overcome during their learning programme, leading some to withdraw. To improve the current apprenticeship system, a conceptual model was created based on community of practice theory, the findings from this study and the literature. It can be used by the University to inform all parties of their responsibilities at each stage of the apprenticeship and provides the basis for a strategic partnership agreement with its employer customers.

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

17 November 2023

Signed ……. Date …….

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the experiences of learners from large organisations on the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship (CMDA) at the University of Gloucestershire. For the purpose of this study, a large organisation is defined as one that pays the apprenticeship levy, meaning that an organisation's payroll is more than £3 million each year. The aim of the study is to improve CMDA learner retention by identifying the factors that enhance or diminish motivation and persistence. An interpretivist paradigm has been used, including a qualitative research design taking an inductive approach. Community of Practice theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) was used as the lens to view and analyse the material gathered from interviews and questionnaires, using reflexive thematic analysis. The background and context of this research, together with its rationale are provided in this introduction. It begins with a short profile of the University of Gloucestershire, which is the host apprenticeship provider organisation, then gives an overview of work-based learning in a higher education context. An explanation of how degree apprenticeships differ from traditional undergraduate programmes is then provided together with the performance of the sector and of the University. Finally, the aim of the research and its objectives are presented together with an outline of the structure of this thesis.

1.1 The University of Gloucestershire

The University can trace its history to the mid-1800s, beginning with the Cheltenham and Gloucester Mechanics Institute with the Cheltenham School of Art being established a few years later. The University is best known locally for teacher training which began in 1920 at St Paul's and St Mary's College of Education. University status was achieved in 2001. There are four campuses in Gloucester and Cheltenham, with a fifth campus planned to be operational in Gloucester city centre during the 2024/25 academic year. It has a diverse curriculum and a community of 12,000 students organised into four schools. The University prides itself on its student-centred approach. This was recognised in the 2022 What Uni? Student Choice Awards, where the University achieved third place for lecturers and teaching quality and it was placed in the top ten for student support. In 2020, an economic impact analysis reported that the University contributes £151.2 million to the county's economy and 2,163 jobs (Freeman, 2020).

The University's business engagement team is based at the Gloucestershire Business School. It is responsible for promoting degree apprenticeships and growing the University's business and reputation with organisations in the region. Together with their academic colleagues, the team has developed strong relationships with employers in the public, private and third sectors including health, financial services, teaching and IT/cyber. Degree apprenticeships began to be delivered in 2017, with the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship being introduced in 2018. There are currently 18 apprenticeship standards offered across a number of subject areas including business, cyber, education and health, the NHS being its biggest apprenticeships customer. The University stated its commitment to grow degree apprenticeships in Goal 1: point 20 of its 2022-27 strategic plan, as part of its ambition to grow learner numbers and increase participation in higher education (University of Gloucestershire, 2022).

1.2 Policy context: the apprenticeship reforms

Whilst apprenticeships have been a recognised method of training since the middle ages, with the first laws of apprenticeship being passed in 1563 (House of Commons Library, 2015), degree apprenticeships are a relatively new but significant addition to the education landscape. Their introduction into the higher education system was announced in the HM government publication: English Apprenticeships: Our 2020 vision (HM Government, 2015) and was part of an overhaul of vocational education and training (VET). This publication drew attention to a number of social and economic factors that the government wanted to address through a change in the approach to skills training. The report highlighted growing skills shortages, stating that projections over the coming decade indicated that there would be around 5 million new and replacement job openings for high skilled workers, including management and professional roles. UK productivity was reported as poor compared with international competitors, trailing that of its European neighbours by 20%. Youth unemployment was identified as an issue, which stood at 15-16%. The report stated an ambition to match the low levels of youth unemployment in Germany, Norway and Austria, where the rate had fallen to between 7% to 11%.

Against this backdrop, businessman Doug Richard was commissioned by the government to review apprenticeships. His report made a significant contribution to what is termed the Apprenticeship Reforms (Richard, 2012). The reforms involved a wholesale rethink about the way that work based learning was to be structured and funded in the UK and how VET would

be positioned in terms of its relationship to academic qualifications, as a step towards achieving parity of esteem (Fuller et al., 2013). Degree apprenticeships were introduced as part of the reforms and positioned as an alternative to the full time or part time route of gaining a full bachelors or master's degree. These new higher-level apprenticeships were expected to be particularly attractive to non-traditional students by creating a means to improve social mobility (Department for Education, 2017; QAA, 2022; Universities UK, 2019). The governments headline target was to achieve 3 million apprentices (all levels) by 2020, which was a considerable increase over the 2.2 million achieved during the term of the previous parliament (Association of Colleges, 2015; HM Government, 2017).

To achieve the level of investment needed to fund the apprenticeship reforms, an apprenticeship levy was introduced in 2017. Employers with a payroll of more than £3 million each year were to pay the levy at a rate of 0.5% (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2015). The introduction of the levy was intended to respond to a structural decline in investment in skills, by putting apprenticeships on a long-term sustainable footing (Clarke & Beech, 2018). The system was to be administered by HMRC and monies raised returned to the employer to spend on apprenticeship training via a digital account. Employers with a payroll less than £3 million were to pay a proportion of the training costs, with the government funding the balance. This system has been criticised by organisations such as the CBI (CBI, 2020), but remains largely unchanged since its introduction.

1.3 What is a degree apprenticeship?

In England, degree apprenticeships are available to anyone over the age of 18. They offer an alternative way to access higher education and regarded as a vehicle for upskilling (Universities UK, 2019) by creating new routes into higher-level work (Lester et al., 2016). Degree apprenticeships take between three to six years to complete, depending on the subject and level, with a full undergraduate or master's degree awarded upon successful completion. Table 1 provides an example of the differences between a traditional degree and a degree apprenticeship, based on a level six degree programme in business and management.

Table 1. Generic differences between traditional campus-based degrees and work-based learning programmes

Undergraduate degree in business and management	CMDA degree apprenticeship
Course is anchored in academic knowledge	Course is anchored in management practice, knowledge and skills
Predominantly campus based	Significant periods of work experience (80%)
Modules focus on content and application of academic knowledge	Modules emphasise projects and problem solving
Assessment dominated by academic tasks	Significant assessment through work-based projects
Career academic staff dominate training	Delivered by academic and practitioner staff – professors of practice
Management skills often embedded in modules	Management skills likely profiled through a reflective portfolio
Degree award is the major outcome	Degree plus professional award e.g. Chartered Manager.
Graduate job prospects – generic degree benefits	Graduate job prospects significantly enhanced by 'CV-able' experience

Source: Reproduced from Welbourn et al. (2019).

1.4 The learning environment

Lester (2020) asserts that degree apprenticeships represent the best attempt in recent years to close the academic/vocational divide that has been a feature of the British education and training system for many years. This is because degree apprenticeships are practically orientated, but academically credible (Crawford-Lee & Moorwood, 2019b). Konstantinou and Miller (2020) suggest that degree apprenticeships are well placed to address the gap that exists between the attributes that employers look for in graduates and the governments knowledge based economic agenda, stating that these two factors are not always aligned.

Successful collaboration between employers and universities is regarded as key to creating the learning environment, which is a shared responsibility between the employer and its university partner (Lester, 2020). Workplace mentors play a pivotal role between the two organisations, but it is a role that is often absent or misunderstood. The principal function of the mentor is supporting their apprentice to develop an understanding of the application of

theory to practice, develop self-efficacy and help learners to manage the boundaries between the workplace community and the academic community. By working collaboratively with the university course team and helping to create a learning environment, which encompasses both the university and the workplace, mentors can affect the quality of the apprenticeship provision and successful learner outcomes (Roberts et al., 2019). The terms mentor and coach are often conflated and used interchangeably (Western, 2012). Although there are similarities as both mentors and coaches adopt a similar set of skills and adapt them according to their particular focus (CIPD, 2023), in apprenticeship rather than in any other use of these terms, the role of a mentor is more clearly defined. Generally, the role of a coach is based upon professional expertise in the field of coaching, whereas in apprenticeship, mentors are experienced in the mentees area of work (Roberts et al., 2019).

1.5 Monitoring the quality of apprenticeship delivery and learning

The body with overall accountability for the quality of apprenticeships is the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). In its April 2021 update, it listed the five partner organisations involved, setting out their roles and responsibilities, summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The organisations involved in the quality of apprenticeship provision

	Responsible body
Overall accountability for quality, including the occupational standard and the end-point assessment	The Department for Education (DfE) acting through the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)
Apprenticeship standards development, review, and approval	Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education
Quality of training provision	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted)
Quality of qualifications in Register of Regulated Qualifications	Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)
Standards of higher education qualifications awarded by degree awarding bodies	Office for Students (OfS)

Source: ESFA (2021)

In 2021, Ofsted became responsible for inspecting the quality and standards of apprenticeships at all levels delivered by all registered providers. Judgement is guided and assessed by inspectors against the prevailing education inspection framework (EIF), with findings reported to the ESFA and the OfS. Achievement data, usually published in March each year by the Department for Education also provides Oftsed with an indicator of the quality and health of each university's apprenticeship provision.

Although off the job training guidance provided by the Department for Education (2023a) is comprehensive, ensuring adherence to policy is difficult to achieve. There is little doubt that administrational obligations are met by universities, such as the Apprenticeship Agreement, Training Plan, Individual Learning Record and Self-Assessment Reports, as these are key documents that form the basis of compliance, checked during Ofsted and ESFA inspections. However, there is much room for interpretation in practice, in particular the quality of the work-based activity undertaken by apprentices. It is difficult enough for inspectors to authenticate recorded off the job time allocation, it is even more difficult to check the breadth and relevance of off the job experience and the extent of collaboration between the university and employer. Although Lester (2020) found examples of good practice, they also found that in many cases work-based training was unplanned and employers in the IFF research (2022) survey felt that communication between the universities and themselves could be improved.

1.6 Distance learning

Over the past decade there have been significant advances in education technology (Ed Tech). This together with the effect of the pandemic on education practice has revealed the potential of this method of teaching and learning, with many universities now offering blended learning to complement classroom-based pedagogy (Hobbs & Bolan, 2021).

Given the flexibility of distance learning, it is an option that may suit employees involved in shift work, making block release attendance at university difficult, or where personal circumstances means that study can only be fitted in between other responsibilities. By choosing distance learning the learner constructs their own learning timetable, but the personal interaction with tutors, mentors and peers is absent. An advantage is the ability for learners to take a staged approach to completion. This means spreading their learning programme over a longer period of time; up to six years (the maximum time allowed), compared to a traditional university, which usually take three to four years (without accreditation of prior learning (APL)). Learners enrolled on university-based apprenticeships

are able to take a break in learning (BIL) for a maximum of twelve months, then recommence their programme of study without penalty (ESFA, 2021). Also, learners that drop out can 'bank' any modules that have been successfully completed and use them as APL at a later date or on another course. But neither a BIL or banking modules is recognised by employers or universities as a means to achieve staged completion in a traditional university setting.

Distance learning is a good option for many, but there are disadvantages and considerations as an employer and as a learner. Telka Oliver (2022) comments that it can be as effective as, or more effective than, classroom-based delivery in some subjects and contexts. But, she suggests that learner engagement and motivation are a problem for many, with older, self-motivated learners being better suited to fully remote learning. She also raises the issue of digital poverty, a problem impacting tens of thousands of university students (Telka Oliver, 2022). Although access to on line resources is usually available on campus, or in the workplace for apprentices, digital poverty can prohibit learning at home, making distance learning impossible (Telka Oliver, 2022). Dropout from distance learning courses is difficult to define, but learner outcomes can be as low as 15% to 20% of learners graduating (Hobbs & Bolan, 2021; Mishra, 2017; Williams, 2023).

There is an international body of work that considers the development of distance learning, including its advantages and disadvantages, but as the University of Gloucestershire does not offer distance learning as an option for the CMDA, it is not in scope for this study.

1.7 The value of degree apprenticeships

Assessing the true value of degree apprenticeships is difficult as they are a relatively new addition to the higher education landscape, so the full impact for individuals and organisations is hard to assess (Nawaz et al., 2023). There are mixed views. Degree apprenticeship numbers are increasing each year and for the majority of organisations that have engaged as a means of staff development, their addition has been welcomed and appear to be working well. Research by Universities UK (2019) and Nawaz et al. (2023) stated that in a short space of time this provision has produced multiple benefits for the employers that choose to offer them. However, these surveys only included employers that were advocates of degree apprentices and did not feature any counter positions from employers that were not. Nawaz et al. (2023) systematically reviewed over 4000 data points and found that whilst degree apprenticeships are meeting their intended purpose by contributing positively to some

UK government objectives, for example to increase social mobility and productivity, there is not enough peer reviewed evidence to make a judgement of their overall impact.

It is clear to understand the value of degree apprenticeships for the individual; they involve gaining new skills in order to improve work prospects without incurring debt. Nawaz et al. (2023) found that over 78% of degree apprentices from Manchester Metropolitan University received a pay rise between 2015 and 2021, with 64% receiving a promotion. This was also found to be the case in a wider study by the IFF research (2022). For employers, degree apprenticeships offer the opportunity to develop a talent pipeline, at a time when recruitment is difficult in most sectors and professional occupations. They appear to be good for employee retention too, with the IFF research (2022) indicating that 80% of degree apprentices intended to stay with the employer that sponsored their training after graduating. Surprising then that although learner numbers are increasing, the number of providers and employers adopting degree apprenticeships does not reflect the benefits that are promoted by advocates, be they individuals or organisations. Of the 240 organisations registered on the Apprenticeship Provider and Assessment Register (APAR), only 99 had recorded any degree apprenticeship starts, which the regulator described as a market failure (Chowen, 2024). This could suggest that the perceived value of degree apprenticeships by employer advocates, their providers and government are not being widely recognised.

1.8 Research context

As stated, the number of learners on degree apprenticeship programmes has been increasing year on year since their introduction in 2015 (Department for Education, 2023b). This growth is due to a number of factors, including the increasing number of level six and level seven apprenticeships becoming available across all industrial sectors and occupations. The problem is learner persistence, as nationally the retention rate has been low, with the latest achievement data for all apprenticeships revealing a 53% retention rate and business management apprenticeships being a particular problem area at 50% (Campden, 2023; Department for Education, 2023b). However, each year approximately 98% of apprentices that complete their programme are successful (Department for Education, 2023b). In other words, most of those that complete their apprenticeship, pass their apprenticeship. It is a reasonable assumption that most learners enrol on a learning programme with a commitment to complete their programme (Tinto, 2017), so withdrawing, if this is a learners choice, is a

significant decision that might affect an individual's employment prospects and also lead them to question their own ability.

If the reasons for dropout were better understood and strategies developed to improve persistence, degree apprenticeships could be a means to increase the number of workers with degree level qualifications. This could provide greater employment security, help to reduce skills gaps and contribute to increasing social mobility through access to higher education, as mentioned in the governments Apprenticeships Benefits Realisation Strategy (Department for Education, 2017).

1.9 Degree apprenticeship recruitment, retention and achievement

Recruitment numbers published in March 2023 reflect the impact of COVID on all apprenticeship starts, with overall numbers starting to recover in the 2021/22 academic year. However higher-level apprenticeships have continued to grow each year, as shown in table 2.

Table 2: Apprenticeship starts by academic year, age and level

Apprenticeship starts by age and level
England

	Academic Year							
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Total starts	499,900	509,400	494,900	375,800	393,400	322,500	321,400	349,200
By level								
Intermediate Apprenticeship	298,300	291,300	260,700	161,400	143,600	99,200	84,100	91,500
Advanced Apprenticeship	181,800	190,900	197,700	166,200	174,700	140,800	138,500	151,300
Higher Apprenticeship	19,800	27,200	36,600	48,200	75,100	82,500	98,800	106,400
By age								
Under 19	125,900	131,400	122,800	106,600	97,700	76,300	65,100	77,500
19-24	160,200	153,900	142,200	113,700	116,000	95,300	94,600	106,300
25+	213,900	224,100	229,900	155,500	179,700	151,000	161,700	165,300

Source: House of Commons library 2023

1.9.1 Achievement rates

Achievement rates provide the context for this study and evidence of the scale of the retention problem affecting degree apprentices, including the CMDA. The charts in tables 3 and 4 were created from the Department for Education (2023b) data tables. A positive feature is pass rates, which have been consistently between 97% and 98%, so "if an apprentice gets

to the end of their course they are almost guaranteed to pass" (Linford, 2023). Table 3 provides an overview of apprenticeship performance, comparing the subject area of business and management against all standards. It shows that over the 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 academic years, retention rates across all standards have remained steady at around 53%, or to put it another way 47% dropped out. A report from Richmond and Regan (2023) suggested that if A-level or university students were dropping out in similar numbers it would be a national scandal.

Table 4 compares the performance of the sector subject area of business management, including only levy paying organisations, as this is the target group for this study. It indicates that retention in this subject area is lower than the average across all standards. For the CMDA it is lower again, being 4.1% lower than total and 1.7% below all management apprenticeships. The performance of accounting and finance apprenticeships has been included to provide a benchmark to a standard where, unlike the CMDA, completion is usually a requirement of practice.

Table 3: Year on year comparison. All institutions (levy and non-levy paying)

	All Standards		All Higher Apprenticeships		All Business, Administration and Law	
	20/21	21/22	20/21	21/22	20/21	21/22
Achievement	51.8%	51.4%	53.2%	51.8%	50.0%	51.7%
Retention	53.0%	52.8%	54.4%	53.1%	51.4%	53.1%
Pass	97.8%	97.4%	97.8%	97.5%	97.4%	97.4%
Leavers	181490	224110	53310	62830	26410	75300

Source: Department for Education (2023b)

Table 4: Sector subject area comparisons, including CMDA (levy payers only)

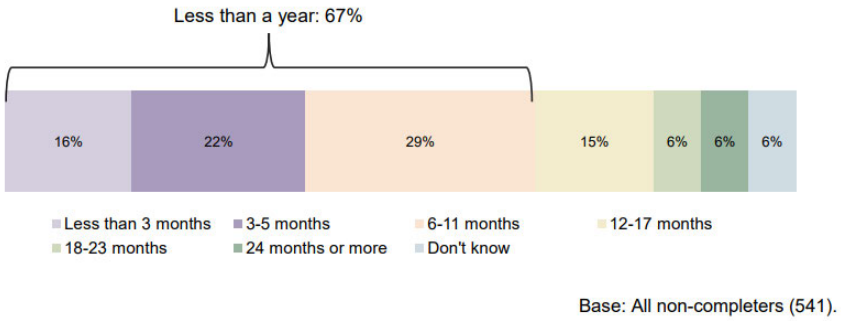
All Accounting and Finance	All Standards	Higher Level	Business Admin & Law	Accounting & Finance	All Business Management	Chartered Manager
	21/22	21/22	21/22	21/22	21/22	21/22
Achievement	54.2%	55.0%	51.7%	56.4%	49.9%	47.9%
Retention	55.3%	56.2%	52.9%	57.9%	50.4%	48.7%
Pass	97.9%	97.8%	97.6%	97.3%	98.9%	98.4%
Leavers	148640	52420	29600	9800	16790	2140

Source: Department for Education (2023b)

Another concerning feature is early dropout. The government commissioned annual apprenticeship evaluation learner survey 2021 (IFF research, 2022), found that 67% of

leavers withdraw from their apprenticeship within the first year, with 38% dropping out within five months of starting, as shown in figure 2 below. Note: 6% of respondents were unsure of when they left their apprenticeship, which explains why the total only reaches 94%.

Figure 2: The proportion of non-completers leaving by number of months of apprenticeship completed (all apprenticeship levels)



Source: IFF research (2022)

1.9.2 Older and non-traditional learners

The age profile of business management apprentices is heavily weighted to the 24+ age group, as can be seen in table 5. The 16-18 age category has the highest retention rate, with dropout becoming progressively higher as the age range increases. This indicates that older learners are more inclined to join these apprenticeship programmes, but are more likely to have other learning challenges (Whiteford et al., 2013) and more inclined to leave; a feature that could be used as an early warning indicator by universities.

Table 5: All institutions by age group (levy only) 2021/22

	age group	leavers	retention	pass_rate	achievement
Higher level standards	16-18	1720	75.4	98	73.9
	19-23	11050	67.9	98	66.5
	24+	39640	52.1	97.7	50.9
All Standards	16-18	17180	62.9	97.4	61.3
	19-23	36370	62.5	97.8	61.1
	24+	95090	51.2	98	50.2
Total	16-18	860	71.6	98	70.2
	19-23	6700	68.3	97.9	66.9
	24+	22040	47.5	97.5	46.3
Accounting and Finance	16-18	560	72.8	97.8	71.2
	19-23	5240	70.2	98.3	69
	24+	4000	39.7	95	37.7
Business Management	16-18	220	75.5	98.8	74.5
	19-23	890	62.3	97.7	60.8
	24+	15680	49.4	99	48.9

Source: Department for Education (2023b)

When degree apprenticeships were introduced in 2015 they were expected to have a positive effect on social mobility and this has proved to be the case (Department for Education, 2017). There are many ways to look at social mobility in relation to educational equity, including university participation and historical attainment gaps between social groups. Degree apprenticeships formed part of the government's strategy to address these issues and attract those who are working, but would be first-generation university attendees. They may have lower qualification levels due to any number of reasons, often economic disadvantage, or family circumstances (HM Government, 2017; Leitch, 2006; Sainsbury, 2016). This learner group is referred to as non-traditional. It is defined in many ways, but usually because of being in one or more of the following categories: older (over 21 years-old), first generation higher education students, or lower socio-economic status and older learners that have been out of education for some time (Burnell, 2015; Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011).

Degree apprenticeships have met the government's expectation and been successful in attracting learners with non-traditional backgrounds. The increase has been noted in learner surveys and by professional bodies (Chartered Management Institute, 2020a; Engeli & Turner, 2019; IFF research, 2022). The Chartered Management Institute (2020a) report found that the majority of CMDA learners were already employed, with more than half of those starting degree level apprenticeships being over 25 years of age. Lester et al. (2016) discusses the role that degree apprenticeships play in the health sector, where older nurses commented that without them, they would not have been able to achieve their registered nurse qualification. Engeli and Turner (2019) noted that in their survey more than one in ten respondents would not have engaged in higher education if degree apprenticeships were not available to them. However, as mentioned, Whiteford et al. (2013) highlight the significant weaknesses that this group have on entering degree apprenticeships, an assertion that was found to be accurate when conducting the field work for this study.

1.9.3 University of Gloucestershire performance

Since the CMDA was introduced by the University in 2018, a total of 58 learners have enrolled on the programme. This number excludes closed groups, where cohorts are from one organisation. It also excludes an employer which enrolled a large number of its employees onto the CMDA, but a reorganisation early in 2019 resulted in some apprentices being made redundant. The headline retention rate for the University's CMDA programme since its introduction in the 2018/19 academic year to 2021/22 was 52%. The retention rate improved

significantly in 2021/22, which is the last full year, rising to 69%. This is better than the 2021/22 national retention rate for the CMDA, which is 48.7%. The early leaver profile is similar to the IFF findings in figure 1, with all leavers dropping out in year one; 43% leaving within the first six months and one third in the first three months (appendix A).

In 2021/22 the top 20 performing universities had an average retention rate of 77.5% for the CMDA programme, with the highest placed institution recording a 90% retention rate and the lowest 68.2% (Department for Education, 2023b). The University's retention rate of 69% places it 20th in the table. Currently the government's focus is on achievement rates, but there is growing support for a different approach, including more scrutiny on rates of retention. In an interview with FE Week, the CEO of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) commented that the way that performance measures are calculated is out of date and should be focused on outcomes, not outputs, including non-completers (Chowen, 2023).

1.10 Research aim and objectives

Following the publication of the 2021/22 achievement data (Department for Education, 2023b), the Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education sent a letter to university and college leaders, stating his ambition to move the overall apprenticeship achievement rate from 51% to 67% (appendix B). Retention is key to learner success, exemplified by the pass rate, which indicates that the majority of learners that finish their apprenticeship, pass their apprenticeship, thereby improving achievement rates. However, there is another perspective, that of learner persistence, which is closely related to retention, but not the same. The distinction between the two terms is important as it is learner persistence that is the focus of this study. Retention is a university performance measure and concerns the strategies used to keep students engaged and complete their programme of study, whereas persistence describes the effort and mindset of learners to continue with their studies despite the expected and unexpected challenges (Hagedorn, 2005). In other words, learners persist and institutions retain (Hagedorn, 2005). To give an example, a learner might transfer to another university, therefore persist with their studies, which is good for the learner, but this negatively impacts the retention rate of the university. The distinction between the two terms is important, but regardless of the difference, they are interdependent. Tinto (2017) asserts that only when universities understand how student perceptions shape decisions to persist can they influence those decisions and increase retention. The aim of this

research study is to explore the factors and perceptions that enhance or diminish persistence from the perspective of learners and in so doing develop a plan of action to improve rates of retention and achievement for the University of Gloucestershire. The research question and objectives set the context and scope for this study and a well-established theory of situated learning provides the theoretical foundation and lens (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

1.10.1 Research question

To critically explore whether the principles and characteristics defined by Jean Lave and Étienne Wenger in community of practice theory, could be used to improve the persistence of learners from large organisations enrolled on the chartered management degree apprenticeship programme at the University of Gloucestershire.

1.10.2 Objectives

1 To examine the current CMDA learning environment and practices to identify influences that enhance or diminish learner persistence, including the relationships, interactions and responsibilities of learners, employers and the University.
2 To compare the principal features that define community of practice theory with current practice to establish if the theory, or any of its parts, could improve learner persistence and consequently increase the rates of programme retention and achievement.
3 To assess the transferability and sustainability of any recommended changes to current practice.

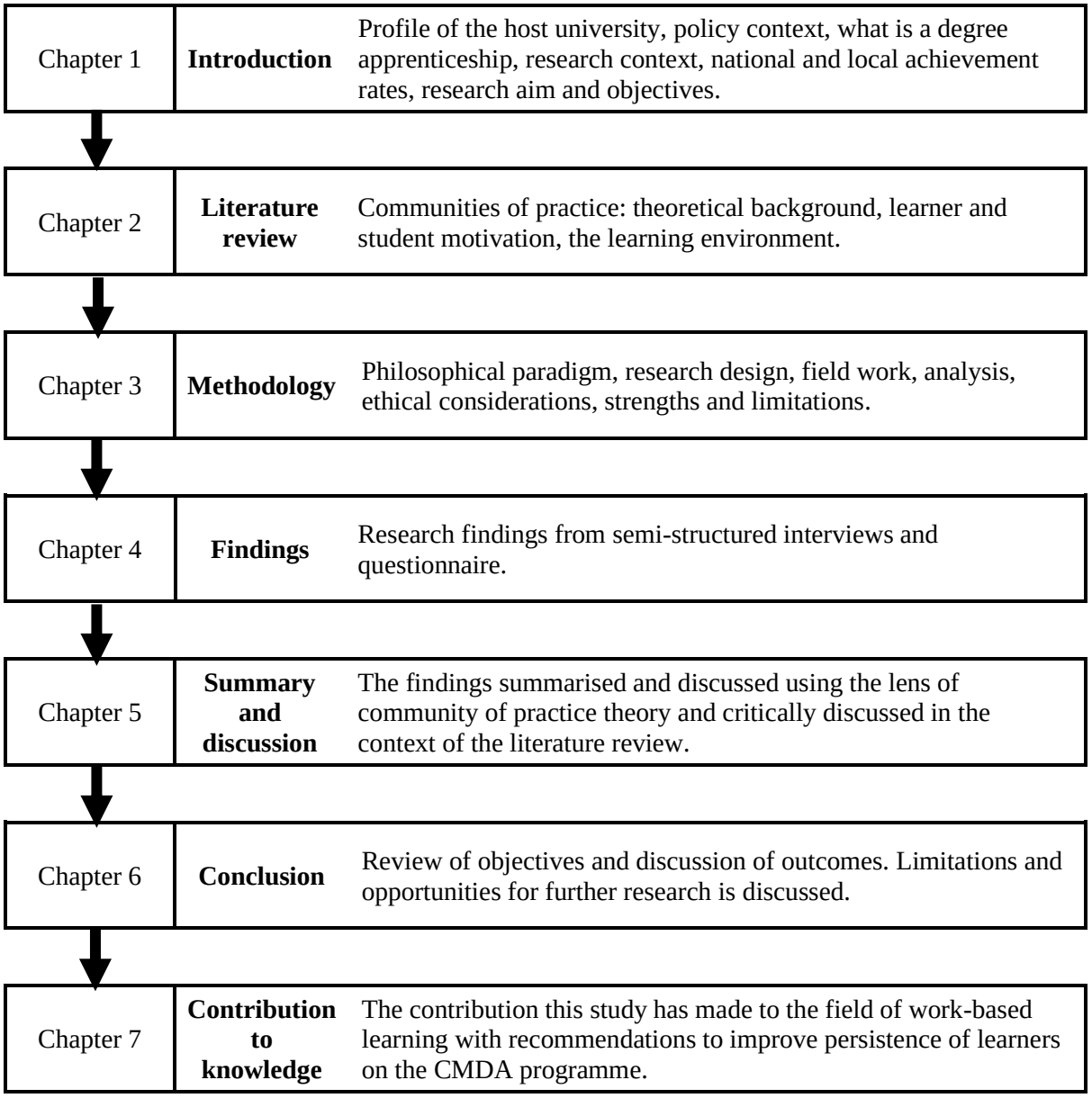
1.11 Theoretical foundation

The socially situated, practice-based approach to learning embodied in community of practice theory provides the theoretical foundation for this study. It was developed by anthropologist Jean Lave and educational theorist Étienne Wenger, published in their monograph: Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The theory's roots are in vocational education and draws upon the work of theorists such as Vygotsky (1980) and those that challenged the individualistic, acquisition-based model of learning, by suggesting that human development comes from social interaction rather than teaching and the social situations and interactions in which it takes place (Vaughan & Dornan, 2014). As such, it was used to provide a lens through which to develop a deeper understanding of learner motivation and persistence.

Current degree apprenticeship practice was compared to the theory to establish whether the principles proposed as being essential to success in situated learning settings are transferrable in practice and might improve the persistence of CMDA learners at the University of Gloucestershire. To achieve this, an interpretivist approach was taken. Material from interviews with current learners at different stages of the programme and those that had dropped out before completion were analysed to identify the themes that enhanced or diminished persistence. These experiences and perspectives were then triangulated using information from interviews with employers and the University.

1.12 Thesis structure

This thesis comprises six chapters, shown in figure 3 below:



1.13 Chapter summary

This chapter provided context to the study by presenting an overview of degree apprenticeships, what they are and the policy changes that led to their introduction as part of the apprenticeship reforms in 2015. The aim for degree apprenticeships was to contribute to upskilling the workforce by providing an alternative to traditional higher education programmes, promoting social mobility and helping to change the perception of vocational education. They presented universities with an opportunity to work more closely with employers and develop a new learner stream in a highly competitive and crowded higher education market, but the cultural shift for universities to accommodate this new addition cannot be underestimated. It is still early days as it takes time for such a significant change in the higher education system to settle, but the continued increase in the numbers joining higher level apprenticeships demonstrates the demand for these programmes.

The terms retention and persistence were introduced and defined as being closely related, but not the same. Learners persist and institutions retain (Hagedorn, 2005). Learner outcome data was presented that provided context to which these terms can be applied and highlighting the research problem that this study seeks to explore, that of learner persistence. The data revealed a low institutional retention rate, but a high pass rate for those learners that persisted. Developing a better understanding of the learner experience and what motivates a learner to persist or withdraw from an apprenticeship could make a significant difference to learner outcomes, recruitment numbers and employer confidence in the apprenticeship learning model.

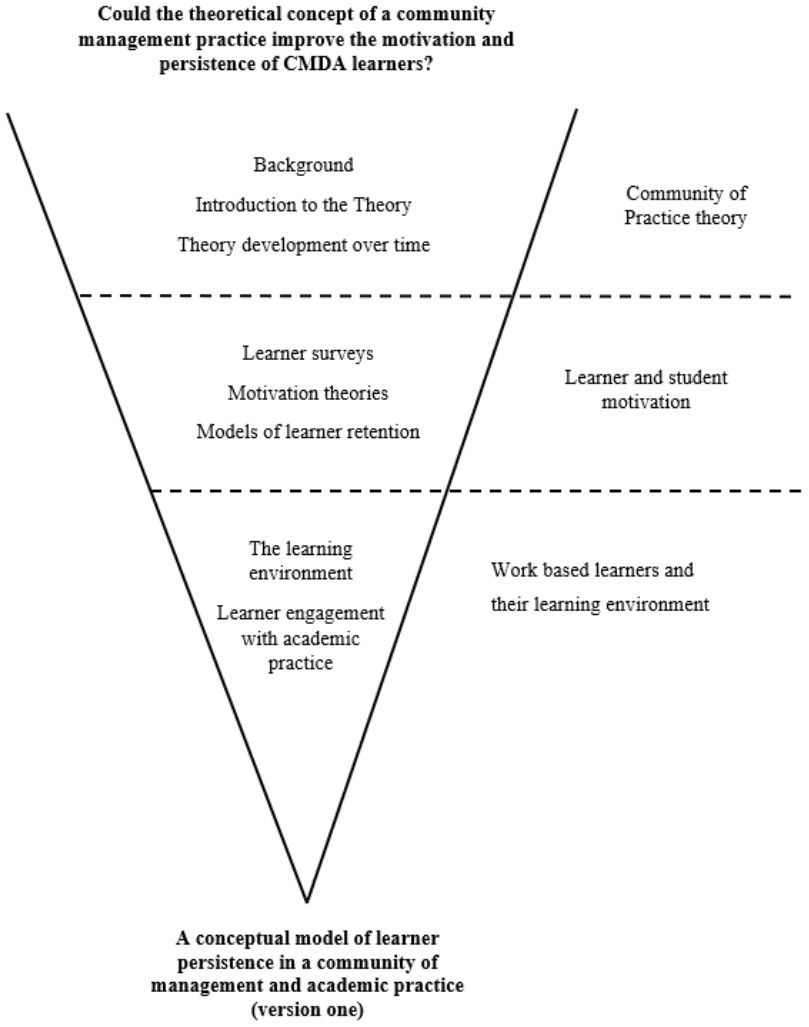
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter a review of literature is presented that is associated with work-based learning and motivation, but it also draws on a body of work, built over many decades, that considers student persistence in traditional university settings. It begins by exploring Jean Lave and Étienne Wenger's socio-cultural theory of learning, elucidated in their monograph Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation, otherwise known as community of practice theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It takes as its focus the relationship between learning and the social situations and interactions in which learning takes place. As such, it provides a lens through which to develop a deeper understanding of learner motivation and persistence, therefore provides the theoretical foundation for this study. Since its publication, the theory has been widely cited (Pyrko et al., 2019). Over the past 25 years it has transitioned from theory to a practice-based approach and been adopted and expanded in a number of different disciplines and sectors, including knowledge management, the health sector and education (Omidvar & Kislov, 2014).

Following an overview and critical review of the theory and its development over time, learner motivation is reviewed. First, the findings from three national learner surveys present the perceptions and experiences of learners, including degree apprentices. All were qualitative studies involving interviews with large numbers of participants. The chapter continues by considering motivation theory, specifically Self Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), to provide an understanding of the influences that might affect an individual's decision making. Then persistence studies from leading educational theorists are reviewed, including their conceptual models of retention, which are predominantly based on traditional students. Themes that are transferable to a work-based learning context are drawn out and explored. In the third and final section, challenges and best practice from studies reviewing the development and delivery of degree apprenticeship programmes are reviewed. The findings from the literature review are used to create version one of a conceptual model of learner persistence in a community of management and academic practice. This model guides the field work stage of this study, including informing the questions that will be used with participants taking part in semi structured interviews. Figure 4 summarises the structure of this chapter.

Figure 4: Literature review structure



2.2 COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

"Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour: a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking new forms of expression, a group of engineers working on similar problems, a clique of pupils defining their identity in the school, a network of surgeons exploring novel techniques, a gathering of first-time managers helping each other cope."

Wenger-Trayner (2015)

New theories of learning in the late 1980s questioned whether traditional cognitivist, classroom-based learning was as effective as practice-based learning. Situated learning theory emerged at this time, drawing attention to the dynamic nature of socio-cultural learning and

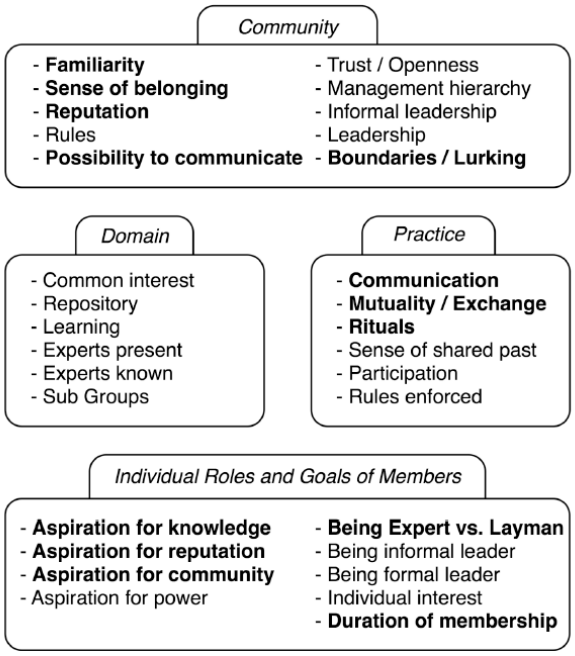
the tacit dimension of workplace practice (Brown et al., 1989; Handley et al., 2006). As a result of this work, it became accepted that knowledge is not just acquired in a systematic fashion and that context is essential to understanding learning and practice (Handley et al., 2006). The Institute for Research on Learning (IRL) in Palo Alto, California contributed significantly to these discussions (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It was here that a group of distinguished academics created a forum to discuss the nature of learning and used apprenticeship as a focus. Anthropologist Jean Lave and educational theorist Étienne Wenger were part of this group and community of practice theory emerged from their discussions. They state that their purpose was to try and "rescue the idea of apprenticeship" as they felt no one was certain what the term meant in the United States (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). It was understood to be a synonym for situated learning, which they describe as an equally uncertain term. They felt that both terms covered a broad range of learning activity and were in danger of becoming meaningless. The emphasis in communities of practice is on learning, rather than teaching, which is reinforced in interviews and presentations by the authors (Berkeley Graduate Division, 2011; Farnsworth et al., 2016; Omidvar & Kislov, 2014). In an interview in 2014 Etienne Wenger said: "When we started our work in the Institute for Research on Learning, our mission was to divorce learning from teaching and we started to think of learning as a phenomenon in itself" (Omidvar & Kislov, 2014, p. 269). The theory was adopted by authors interested in organisational development, where much of the extant literature about the practical application of situated learning and community of practice theory has focussed. Notably John Brown and Paul Duguid who were part of the original research team at Palo Alto have developed a body of work in this field (Brown et al., 1989).

Communities of Practice theory draws from a broader socio-cultural tradition with notable similarities to Vygotsky's theories (Vygotsky et al., 1999), challenging traditional ideas of the acquisition of knowledge by suggesting that learning and human development is a consequence of social interaction. Vygotsky's Social Development Theory made a significant contribution to constructivism and sociocultural theory (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Vygotsky, 1980). Vygotsky claimed that thought develops from society to the individual and not the other way around (Amineh & Asl, 2015); learning happens because we interact with the environment. We do not learn because we have developed, we develop because we have learnt and learning new things enhances our developmental level (Vygotsky, 1980). But, in order to learn we must be presented with situations that are just beyond our present abilities. If something is too simple or well beyond our capability, no learning occurs. Vygotsky called

the distance between a learner's knowledge and mastery of the task 'the Zone of Proximal Development' or ZPD (Vygotsky et al., 1999). He asserted that a learner's full cognitive development requires social interaction with the support of more knowledgeable others (MKO), or masters/mentors, to move learners through the zone (Gauvain & Cole, 1997). He introduced the concept of scaffolding to describe how this support can be facilitated by providing instruction that is just beyond the level that a learner can achieve alone. MKOs bridge the learning gap to enable the learner to get to the next level (Vygotsky et al., 1999). An important point here is that this support is individualised and applied proactively, after the tutor has established where and how a learner needs help.

Lave and Wenger's work was informed by Jean Lave's ethnographic study of craft apprentices in West Africa in the late 1970s where she developed her idea of learning as participation (Lave, 1996). The theory was further developed with Étienne Wenger through reflecting on learning practices in very different contexts, which included meat cutters, Yucatec midwives and non-drinking alcoholics (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Their theory proposes that the most effective way to think about human learning is through the time-honoured apprenticeship model, where newcomers learn from masters, or to use their terminology - old timers (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The theoretical concept of a community of practice contextualises apprenticeship as situated learning within an environment comprising collective learning and shared knowledge, values and beliefs (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger-Trayner, 2015). The term situated learning refers to the situated or located context of the knowledge, thinking and learning, which they believe cannot be separated from experience. Wenger-Trayner (2015) define a community of practice as having three crucial characteristics, namely a shared DOMAIN of interest, a COMMUNITY where members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other and share information, and PRACTICE, where members develop a shared repository of resources including experiences, stories, tools and ways of addressing recurring problems. Wenger-Trayner (2015, p. 1) states that a community of practice "could apply to a network of surgeons exploring new techniques, or a group of first-time managers helping each other to cope." The concept is expressed graphically in figure 5 (Wolf, 2010).

Figure 5: A visual expression of a Community of Practice



Source: Wolf (2010)

The authors define their approach to situated learning as a "fresh look at learning" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 39)**.** But, they point out that it is a "general theoretical perspective, it is not an educational form or pedagogical strategy" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 40). The power of a community of practice comes through participation with others, so it is the wider process where personal and community transformation takes place. Newcomers develop their knowledge through collaborating with peers and by working alongside more experienced members and gradually begin to adopt the practices of the community. This social and modulated perspective treats learning as a process of constructing practice, meaning and identity (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998a). Later, Wenger (1998b) wrote that he sees communities of practice as places where learning and meaning are negotiated through participation and reification. Reification, he explains, is the process of giving form to experience by producing objects. Wenger (1998a) asserts that practice develops coherence and he identified three 'dimensions' to explain this. First, relationships are developed through mutual engagement. Second, this joint enterprise creates a bond between members. Third, a shared repertoire of resources is created, which includes stories, language and artefacts.

There is no standard temporal dimension, or linear notion of skill acquisition leading to a core or centre, that would suggest that knowledge acquisition can be measured. However, Lave

and Wenger (1991) do state it is possible to define the learning process in some communities by analysing its reproduction cycle, that is, the time it takes for an apprentice to become a full participant. In the case of quartermasters, which is one of the examples given in their book, the cycle is six years.

2.3 Key characteristics of community of practice theory

Some important influences and processes that are features of the theory and of socio-cultural learning have been drawn out and presented next. This will provide a better understanding of these constituent parts and the interactions between them that affect an individual's perceived, or actual ability to engage in participation and practice. Each has a direct effect on the acquisition of knowledge as learners travel towards full membership of their community of practice.

2.3.1 Legitimate peripheral participation

Legitimate peripheral participation, or LPP, is described as a "central defining characteristic" of their theory and the situated activity of learning, so much so that it is the title of the first chapter in their book (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). It is the process by which a learner becomes part of a community of practice, described as: "a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artefacts and communities of knowledge and practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). The learner journey in a community of practice is conceived as a trajectory in which newcomers start from this position of legitimate peripherality and move in a centripetal direction towards more intensive participation, motivated by their aspiration to become full practitioners (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

The authors did not intend for each of the three components of the concept to be considered in isolation, but taken as a whole, as the constituent parts relate to each other and in combination "create a landscape of community membership" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 33). Whilst they make this assertion, they do use parts of the concept to describe specific practices or situations, so it would appear that its components can be used separately, but only within the context and scope of its defining role within the theory. For example, Wenger et al. (2015) describes the concept of 'legitimacy' as a newcomer that has received approval, or sponsorship from a master, which enables them to be accepted into the community and become a peripheral participant, having access to its processes and products. Wenger (2010)

emphasises that the legitimate participant must also make a contribution which includes the complex social dimension, including the thinking and language of the community. Legitimacy is a status that should be recognised by others, by treating them as newcomers and learners, rather than experienced professionals and full members of the community. This involves the community supporting the learner and allowing them a safe space to participate, to learn from mistakes and become absorbed in the "culture of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 95).

Fuller et al. (2005, p. 66) challenged Lave and Wenger's implication that all participants join a community of practice as "tabula rasa" and progress at the same pace, as many join an apprenticeship with significant experience. Their case study followed apprentices with different backgrounds through their learning journeys and described how their experience and journey differed from each other. This perspective is relevant to many CMDA learners as they join the programme with established identities as managers, with beliefs, understandings, skills and attitudes already formed. Fuller et al. (2005) refers to Bourdieu's dispositions to life, to work and to learning as important to recognise, as this can affect how the apprentice is seen and treated by their employer and how the apprentice wants to be seen and treated during the learning programme.

2.3.2 Identity

Lave and Wenger (1991) acknowledge that the focus of communities of practice is on the structure of social practice and participation, therefore appears not to take the person into account. However, they insist that participation in social practice suggests an explicit focus on the individual, but as "a person in the world; a member of a sociocultural community" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 52). Social practice involves an individual learning to become fully proficient in a particular area of work, mastering new understandings and performing new tasks, which are part of broader systems (Lave & Wenger, 1991). These systems do not exist in isolation but developed within social communities. In this way a person is defined by these relations and identities are constructed. "Learning and a sense of identity are inseparable" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 115), but it is not just about "learning to do but learning to be", which includes experiences of failure and intense emotion (Wenger et al., 2015, p. 41).

Wenger et al. (2015) suggests when building identities, there are three modes of identification that that are influential. *Engagement* gives direct experience of regimes of practice and builds

competence. *Imagination* positions an individual's relationship within the community and within the wider landscape, by understanding his or her place in it and being able to imagine possible future learning and career trajectories. *Alignment* ensures that activities are negotiated and coordinated with others within the landscape and that intentions are implemented. The combination of these three aspects of identification help to make sense of the landscape and locating an individual's identity within it.

Handley et al. (2006) suggests that Lave and Wenger (1991) provide surprisingly little reference to identity construction. Surprising they go on to say, because learning involves a process of understanding who we are and to which communities of practice we belong and are accepted. In this context Handley et al. (2006) see the portrayal of discrete communities of practices proposed by Wenger (1998b), where learning and identity are fully situated, as problematic. Wenger proposes that an individual changes to adapt to each of the many different communities of practice to which they belong. Handley et al. (2006) disagrees and points to the concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1990), which directly opposes Wenger's position. He posits that an individual's social and educational background create a disposition which dictate the same behaviour in different contexts. However, Handley et al. (2006) takes the middle ground that Mutch (2003) proposes, which suggests that individuals maintain some sense of agency through choosing to adapt by adopting different forms of participation and identity construction within different communities of practice. This approach appears to agree with Contu and Willmott (2003). They state that the construction of identities is central to the theory, as members of a community do not identify a competent member through the acquisition of skill or knowledge, rather it is how they act in ways that are recognised and valued by others. Therefore, if individuals do not adopt different identities within different communities, they will not appear credible to their peers.

2.3.3 Power

Roberts (2006) comments that the implications concerning the distribution of power in communities of practice are absent from the five case studies that are presented by Lave and Wenger (1991), as examples of their theory in practice. She defines power as "the ability or capacity to achieve something, whether by influence, force or control" (Roberts, 2006, p. 626) and goes on to comment on the varying degrees of power within a group that can be determined by age or personality. She also points to the time that community members have spent in practice, as with experience comes power in the negotiation of meaning (Roberts,

2006). The danger she identifies is that meanings may only reflect the dominant source of power, or it could reflect an organisations overall power structure. Marshall and Rollinson (2004, p. 74) agree, commenting that the learner journey presented by Lave and Wenger can be taken to be "quiescent and consensual" but the negotiation of learning in practice is not straightforward and can be subject to disagreement and misunderstanding.

A counter position is presented by Contu and Willmott (2003), who state that it is difficult to find any evidence that power relations were excluded from Lave and Wenger's theory. They point to the title: Legitimate Peripheral Participation, as evidence, as this highlights the power invested process of bestowing legitimacy on newcomers to a community of practice by those with control over resources. Without this legitimacy, it would not be possible to become involved as a member. There is little doubt that power resides with masters and more knowledgeable others, which means that legitimate peripheral participants at the beginning of their journey, are particularly vulnerable to bad practice. This is exemplified in the case study of meat cutters, where power clearly plays a disruptive role in the acquisition of knowledge and progress of apprentices, as they were used as a cheap form of labour by their managers.

Wenger adopts a different position regarding power, refuting claims that his theory does not account for social structures and power relations, by referring to it as a learning theory and not a theory of power (Farnsworth et al., 2016). He states that it does recognise structural power relations, but it is not what it tries to theorise, he adds that there are many existing theories of power so there is no need to invent another. What can be done is to weave them together in what he calls' plug and play'. In his essay, *the practice of theory: confessions of a social learning theorist*, Wenger-Trayner (2013), introduces the concept of plug and play, in which he states that communities of practice can be used successfully in conjunction with other theories. He suggests that plug and play is not easy to achieve, adding that the challenge is: "to have theories running through each other rather than replace each other in some grand unifying theory" (Wenger-Traynor, 2013). He also discusses boundaries in relation to power, stating that boundaries are inevitable as not everyone is at the same point in their development, therefore boundaries and power do intersect. This means that increased competence gives a form of power to those who have legitimacy to enforce it (Farnsworth et al., 2016).

2.3.4 Participation and practice

Participation and practice are central to situated learning, as this is how knowledge, competency and identity are formed and developed (Wenger, 1998b). By participating in a community, a newcomer can develop mutual recognition and the ability to negotiate meaning as they become aware of its practices including tools, language and role definitions. However, this does not necessarily lead to collaboration, respect or equality (Wenger et al., 2015). Handley et al. (2006) express concern that practice, as described by Lave and Wenger (1991) can be interpreted in many ways, such as learning to do something without knowing why it is done. However, practice as praxis suggests meaningful engagement. This raises the issue of degrees of participation that were not present in Lave and Wenger's original presentation of how communities of practice theory works according to Handley et al. (2006). Lave and Wenger (1991) present an apprenticeship model of learning where legitimate peripheral participants were incrementally given increased responsibility by their masters that ended in full participation (the apprentice becomes a master). In their later work Lave and Wenger (2004) acknowledged the dichotomy between peripheral participation and full membership, as some learning trajectories do not follow this path and outcome. Wenger (1998b) suggest that there may be a number of different forms of participation which includes 'marginal', explored in more detail in his later work. Power can play a part in some situations where participation might be denied by more powerful practitioners, due to them having a stake in maintaining existing knowledge and practice as they have invested in it. They want to maintain the status quo and feel threatened by potential change (Handley et al., 2006).

In most cases, the mediated process of learning does not fall to the master. In fact, Lave and Wenger (1991) describe the apprentice/master relationship as surprisingly variable, as often opportunities for learning are accessed through work practices rather than the teacher/learner relationship. They state that this relationship can be a strong one but, in most cases, it is an apprentice's relationship with the wider community that is most important, as developing knowledge and practice requires a diverse field of relationships of participation. The community learns from itself in what is described as a triadic set of relations (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 56). It is comprised of 'journey folk' with varying degrees of experience, from newcomers to masters. It is the importance of these near peers and relative old timers that play the most important part in the circulation of knowledgeable skill amongst apprentices. It is suggested that where the circulation of knowledge among peers and near peers is possible it spreads rapidly and effectively (Lave & Wenger, 1991). These

relationships and their importance to the learning process could be termed mentor and peer relationships in today's degree apprenticeship parlance.

2.3.5 Motivation

A community of practice is presented as an ecosystem where learners are intrinsically motivated by an aspiration to achieve mastery. This aspiration is supported by skilled practitioners who provide apprentices with the confidence that they are developing skills and productive relations with their world of work. It is maintained by the apprentice finding a sense of belonging within the community and developing an identity through increasing knowledge and self-efficacy. The original source of Jean Lave's research was apprentice tailors in Liberia (Lave, 1996). The question is whether the motivation to persist changes when the decision to learn shifts from being influenced by culture and the economic imperative, as in Liberia, to a decision based on choice as with degree apprentices in the UK.

2.3.6 Summary of communities of practice theory

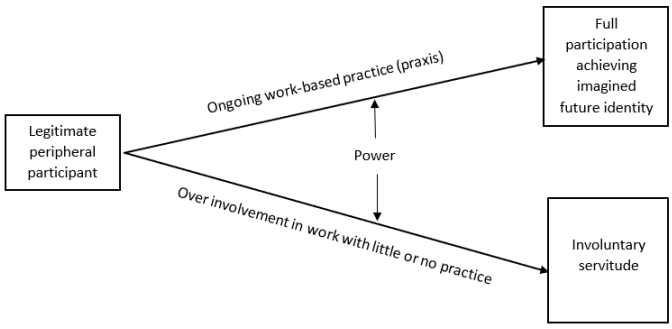
Since its publication, Lave and Wenger's theory has challenged long-standing cognitivist assumptions about learning, emphasising the relational aspects of learning within communities of practice. It has been influential and is one of the most often cited social learning theories (Farnsworth et al., 2016; Roberts, 2006). A search for the terms "Communities of Practice" or "Situated Learning" each returned in excess of 90,000 results on Google Scholar. There have been notable contributions to the theories of communities of practice and situated learning by leading educational and organisational researchers including Brown et al. (1989), Gherardi et al. (1998) and Barley and Orr (1997). Comparisons have been made with other theories, including Bourdieu's notion of habitus (Bourdieu, 1990), Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory (Vygotsky, 1980) and Engstrom's activity theory (Engeström, 1987). The theory has been applied in a variety of settings including business, education, health, IT and developing on line communities. Within organisations this network-based structure has been acknowledged as being well suited for development and sharing of knowledge and practice (Probst & Borzillo, 2008). It has attracted criticisms and raised issues, many constructive, positioned to further enhance its theoretical foundation and practical application (Contu & Willmott, 2003; Handley et al., 2006; Roberts, 2006).

Etienne Wenger's concept of plug and play should also be mentioned as a counterpoint to comments about other theories that appear to disagree or those that are complementary with

aspects of communities of practice theory, as they can be used in conjunction (Farnsworth et al., 2016). Wenger characterises theories in social sciences as "well shaped pieces of a puzzle" and suggests that plug and play is a useful way to think of connecting complementary social theories (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p. 6). However, he urges caution commenting that care must be taken when comparing theories or bringing them together. He states that there are three elements to each theory and one must have a deep understanding of what each theory is about and be clear about how they relate to each other: "One must compare their purpose, their stances and their technical terms, then look for their complementarities and incompatibilities" (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p. 5).

The theory states that learners travel centripetally towards full participation, but for the purpose of illustrating the dynamic nature of the influences described earlier, it is clearer to view them in linear form, summarised in figure 6 below. The learner (newcomer) starts from a position of becoming a legitimate peripheral participant, a status granted by a master, which is the first step in the learner journey. Competency and knowledge are then developed over time, through practice. However, access to participation and practice, as praxis (Roberts, 2006), is in the gift of the master and demonstrates the power they hold to either enhance the learner experience or treat the learner as a commodity and over involve them in work, or "involuntary servitude", rather than practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 64). Any one of the theory's key components, or any combination, has the potential to enhance or diminish learner motivation. As such they will be used, together with other themes that emerge as the literature review proceeds to develop a conceptual model that will be used to compare the theory against current practice. This will help to identify significant factors that could affect learner motivation and be explored in more detail in the field work when talking to learners.

Figure 6: The effect of power on a learner's acquisition of competence and knowledge



Source: Author

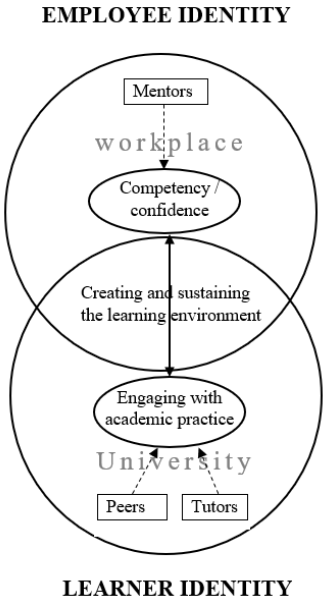
2.4 From theory to practical application

Étienne Wenger continued to develop and define the concept of communities of practice. In later publications he grounded the theoretical concept in practice (Wenger et al., 2002). Omidvar and Kislov (2014) suggest that the evolution of communities of practice theory into a practice-based approach has been a three phased process as Wenger has responded to criticism, the availability of empirical data from studies and observing communities of practice working in real work environments. They suggest that the first phase was learning within communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In the second phase Wenger (1998) further defines the boundaries that exist between communities of practice and the importance of identities. In the third phase Wenger et al. (2015) developed the concept of landscapes of practice. Landscapes of practice introduced interconnected relationships that exist within and between overlapping communities of practice. This is because the notion of a single community of practice does not reflect the complexity of most bodies of knowledge, which as well as practice involves research, regulation, networks, teaching and learning (Wenger et al., 2015). An important consideration is how an individual establishes relationships and an identity, or identities, within overlapping and interconnected communities linked to their own specialist field, especially as a person may not have full membership in each one. To explain this further, Wenger et al. (2015) proposes that a person cannot be competent in all the practices of a landscape but can still be knowledgeable about them regarding the relevance to their own practice. He deals with this by introducing the concept of 'knowledgeability', which describes a person's relations with multiple communities across a landscape of practice. In a single community of practice, an individual's competence is the test of membership and is negotiated and defined with and by the community. Knowledgeability involves no accountability to actual competence, yet is as significant in constructing an identity across a whole landscape of practice (Wenger et al., 2015). This is an important development as it moves what was a conceptual theory into practice by addressing the level of knowledge (not competence) that is required by an individual to deal with communities of practice that surround and intersect their own area of expertise and competence. It is worth repeating Contu and Willmott (2003) who state that the way a member of a community acts is how they are recognised and valued by others. It is also an important consideration for the CMDA programme, which aims to develop knowledgeability, across a range of specialist areas, or a landscape of practice.

2.5 Defining a CMDA community of management and academic practice

A community of practice is defined by Wenger et al. (2015) as consisting of a group of people with a common sense of purpose who work together to share information, build knowledge, develop expertise and solve problems. The primary purpose is learning. A community of management and academic practice involves CMDA learners being involved simultaneously in two separate but interrelated communities, presented in figure 7. One is their principal community, that of the workplace, where the learner's professional future identity is developed in practice; the other is the academic community, which is temporary as learners pass through as part of their professional development and career journey (Wenger et al., 2015). With the support of tutors, mentors and peers, the learner has to manage the boundary between the two communities of practice, using academic literacy and framing knowledge and concepts in ways that are acceptable to the academic disciplinary context, then applying theoretical knowledge in practice.

Figure 7: The relationship between employer, university and learner that creates the learning environment of a community of management and academic practice



Source: author

2.6 LEARNER AND STUDENT MOTIVATION

In this section, the outcomes from national surveys involving apprenticeship learners are reviewed. Next intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is explored and finally studies of motivation and non-completion in traditional student settings offer a theoretical perspective. Mostly from the USA, decades of research have informed student retention theory and practice, which holds relevance and meaning for work-based learning practitioners (Zepke & Leach, 2005).

2.7 Learner surveys

National apprenticeship surveys provide insight into motivation, satisfaction and dropout. Research of this kind in the UK is limited, which is probably due to the relatively recent addition of degree apprenticeships to the education landscape and the disruption that the COVID pandemic had on education. There have been three key reports published since 2019 that used qualitative methods to gain an understanding of learner perceptions and motivation.

Each survey examined apprenticeship and work-based learning from different perspectives. Taken together they provide a good understanding of learner experiences, but there are limitations that should be considered when reflecting on the results. The IFF research (2022) survey involves over 5000 interviews with learners from level two to level six plus, but is not specific about how the sample was selected. Although this is a large random sample of learners and completers, size alone does not prevent bias (Kaplan et al., 2014). The Engeli and Turner (2019) survey focused exclusively on level six and level seven apprentices. The methodology used to build a sample frame for the survey was based on self-selecting institutions registered for the Degree Apprenticeship Development Fund (DADF), which they state make the results less robust and generalisable than if a randomised approach was taken (Engeli & Turner, 2019). Also, it is not clear how they organised and conducted the interviews. The Kantar Public (2019) report is a small in-depth study comprising 36 learner leavers to understand their reasons for non-completion. It was commissioned to provide a more detailed follow-up to their 2018 Learners and Apprentices Survey study that included 12,872 FE learners and apprentices to explore their experiences and outcomes. There is limited information on how the sampling was reached, apart from it being drawn from those who indicated that they left the programme for one of three reasons: personal issues, issues with course quality or got a job. The narrow scope of the survey and no detailed breakdown of the age and genders of participants, or course levels involved limits its value. Finally, the granularity of these reports is limited, for example there is no differentiation between the

perceptions of public and private sector apprentices, or large/small organisations. Notwithstanding these limitations, overall, the findings provided by the three reports provided useful material from learners that contributed to the field work.

2.7.1 An overview of the findings

There were some encouraging indicators about apprenticeships that support their importance as a means to develop much needed skills. For example, it was found that the majority of apprentices that persist and complete their apprenticeship feel more confident in their area of work (IFF research, 2022). Virtually all (99%) of apprenticeship completers gained skills during their apprenticeship. The main skills gained were related to their current or desired area of work (94%). An important feature of this survey was the loyalty shown by apprentices to their employer. Results indicated that 80% of degree apprentices were planning to carry on working for the same employer once they completed their programme of study (IFF research, 2022), which indicates their value as part of an employee retention strategy.

The top motivating factor for degree apprentices was achieving a degree, which supports Lave and Wenger (1991), who state that learner motivation derives from wanting to achieve a future imagined identity. 94% of level six respondents thought this would help them to advance their career as a degree would improve their future prospects, making them more attractive to prospective future employers (Engeli & Turner, 2019; IFF research, 2022). This perception was supported by the findings from the IFF survey, as 40% of respondents had been promoted and 66% had received pay increases (IFF research, 2022).

Satisfaction rates for degree apprentices were mixed; 56% were very satisfied, 35% were fairly satisfied and 5% were dissatisfied. Satisfaction rates for those on business apprenticeships were similar. Regarding the quality of training received, two-thirds of non-completers were satisfied, which was much lower than found among completers at 85% (IFF research, 2022). The most common apprenticeship-related reasons that contributed to apprentices not completing were: not enough time for learning/training (44%), training not being as good as they had hoped (43%) and the apprenticeship being badly run or poorly organised (41%) (IFF research, 2022). A significant feature of the research was early dropout with 38% leaving their learning programme within the first six months (Department for Education, 2023b; IFF research, 2022) .

2.7.2 Learner profile

More than half of those starting degree level apprenticeships were 30 years old or over, with just 20% age 20 or under (Cullinane & Doherty, 2020). The Chartered Management Institute (CMI) report that 70% of those on the CMDA are over 25 years of age (Chartered Management Institute, 2020a). This older age profile is consistent with the government learner data presented in the introduction to this study, with many older learners also having characteristics that define them as non-traditional learners (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011). This means that learners enter degree apprenticeships with social learning histories, including work related experience. The majority of apprentices (56%) worked for their employer before starting their apprenticeship, with older apprentices much more likely to have already been working for their employer (82%). Business apprentices in all age groups were most likely to have already been working for their employer (62%), with 83% being employed for over 12 months (IFF research, 2022).

The surveys did not report learners' highest level of qualification before entering the degree apprenticeship programme, however, the majority of degree apprenticeship places were being taken up by learners who had no previous HE qualification. This suggests that degree apprenticeships are attracting non-traditional learners that have not previously been able to, or were not inclined to, engage with higher education (Engeli & Turner, 2019). The CMI have recognised that degree apprenticeships are attracting non-traditional learners, reporting that the CMDA has seen a strong uptake from older age groups, as mentioned; those from the most socio-economically deprived areas (43%) and female learners (54%) (Chartered Management Institute, 2020a; Engeli & Turner, 2019). Although degree apprenticeships appear to be having a significant effect on widening participation, as anticipated in the governments benefit realisation strategy (Department for Education, 2017), a concerning feature appears to be higher dropout from this group. Non-completion was more prevalent among those in the most deprived index of multiple deprivation quintile (43%), those with disabilities (25%), those who didn't speak English as their first language (12%) and those aged over 35 (11%) (Kantar Public, 2019).

The Sutton Trust reported that two thirds of employers, including a high proportion of larger, levy paying organisations, were committed to making degree apprenticeships accessible to those from lower socio-economic groups (Cullinane & Doherty, 2020). This feature of degree apprenticeships suggests that employers and universities should recognise the opportunity

that non-traditional learners have to upskill the workforce, but also develop strategies to support this group with the aim of countering the high dropout rate.

2.7.3 Participation and practice in the workplace

The greatest challenge faced by apprentices was the interaction between maintaining their responsibilities as an employee and giving sufficient time to their studies (Kantar Public, 2019). When non-completers were asked why they dropped out, the most common response was not having enough time for learning (44% of all non-completers). This reason for drop out was more common than average among business apprentices (51%). Those with compliant levels of off-the-job training (i.e., where this made up 20% or more of their contracted or worked hours) were more likely to be satisfied than those with non-compliant levels of off-the-job training (87% vs. 82%). Results show that there is a link between the amount of off-the-job training apprentices receive and satisfaction levels (IFF research, 2022).

When analysing the issues relating to lack of time, it was found that employers would commonly ask apprentices to prioritise their employment over their coursework, which led to learners falling behind. Learners then completed their coursework in their own time, but this effected their home life, which they felt was unsatisfactory and could impact their stress levels and mental health. In some cases, this was overcome by employers allowing apprentices time to work from home, but for others this increased flexibility was not enough to enable them to continue (Kantar Public, 2019). Apprentices felt this could be overcome if employers were more involved in apprenticeship schemes from the outset, so that workload and course content could be aligned. This included the way the course was structured, the support they could expect and how assessments would be conducted. This communication between the employer and university should start prior to enrolment, as non-completers reported not receiving detailed information about their apprenticeship. This led to learners finding the workload too high for them to manage around their other priorities. They tended to see this as an issue with course quality, associating it with poor course organisation, however this was typically driven by a mismatch between learner expectations and the reality (Kantar Public, 2019).

2.7.4 Work colleagues and mentors

Apprentices were positive about the support of work colleagues as a source of more informal support, which Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 93) call "peers and near peers." As apprentices tended to spend long periods of time without contact with their provider, they sometimes went to colleagues for support when they had questions about their coursework. Colleagues also provided support when apprentices were suffering with mental health difficulties. When apprentices had colleagues or a mentor they trusted, they were willing to seek help from them. It was suggested that a single line manager or mentor be assigned to an apprentice to oversee both the work and study elements of the apprenticeship, working with providers to ensure a holistic learning experience was being provided (Kantar Public, 2019).

2.7.5 Peers

Apprentices enjoyed the contact with peers who were committed to taking their education seriously. They enjoyed the camaraderie when learning and working with peers who were in similar situations to themselves and had a similarly engaged attitude to their course, working together to solve problems, self-reflection and working out their weaknesses (Kantar Public, 2019). Learners commented that they required three main kinds of support whilst on programme: peer support; a sense of achievement from early successes; and online infrastructure to enable remote peer interaction and study (Kantar Public, 2019).

2.7.6 Curriculum engagement and academic practice

The learner profile could explain the difficulties that some found engaging with academic practice, including feeling unprepared for the 'uphill battle' associated with developing study skills (Kantar Public, 2019). The report suggested that universities and employers should be more cognisant of an employee's academic background during the selection stage, as admissions and induction processes need to be supportive of those with non-traditional backgrounds.

Learners commented that an apprenticeship needs to provide new information which would be useful to their career aspirations otherwise they were not regarded as a good use of participants' often limited time. Learners dropped out either when the course was too basic and not teaching them anything useful, but, more commonly it was when learners found the

course too difficult and they felt unable to reach the standard that was expected of them (Kantar Public, 2019).

2.7.7 Summary of findings from learner motivation, satisfaction and dropout surveys

Results from the three surveys provide a detailed picture of degree apprentices perceptions and motivations with power, identity and practice, all components of community of practice theory, being evident in the research findings. Widening participation emerged as an important feature of recruitment as degree apprenticeships are attracting growing numbers of individuals from socio-economic groups that have been under represented in higher education provision (Chartered Management Institute, 2020a; Crawford-Lee & Moorwood, 2019a). The increase in non-traditional learners was expected when degree apprenticeships were launched (Department for Education, 2017) and it appears that expectation seems to be materialising, but with it comes a responsibility to recognise that a differentiated approach is needed to support these learners.

Identity is a strong theme in the research findings. It is clear that there is a conflict between the employee identity and learner identity. The biggest challenge reported by apprentices was the interaction between maintaining their responsibilities as an employee and giving sufficient time to their studies (Kantar Public, 2019). This was particularly problematic where employers asked apprentices to prioritise their employment over their coursework. When learners are treated as employees first and foremost, in the absence of a supportive organisational learning culture, a learner might prioritise work over learning, completing coursework in their own time. Where time for learning is given (and taken) the results show that there is a link between the amount of off-the-job training apprentices receive and satisfaction levels.

Although some good practice was reported, it appears that there is a mismatch between current practice and what comprises a good socio-cultural situated learning experience. Issues concerning dissatisfaction with some basic structural and communication processes were highlighted, indicating that dropout, especially early dropout, may not be entirely due to dissatisfaction with the learning programme or related to motivation, but more about learner management culture. The power of the employer is significant here. Whereas a manager or organisation cannot be responsible for a learner's choice to prioritise work over study, they are able create the environment and expectation.

If community of practice theory is applied, employers have a responsibility to support their apprentices imagined future identity, as this is in their interest as much as the learner. This means providing access to practice, supported and facilitated by mentors. It should however be stated that employers might not be aware of their responsibilities, especially if apprenticeships are a new addition to training and development in their organisation. Given that degree apprenticeships are relatively new, without direction from their partner university, it could be the case that a manager feels their job is done when they grant permission (confer legitimacy) for a member of staff to join the apprenticeship programme. Learners commented that involving employers from the outset would overcome many issues, including the alignment of their workload and the course content.

2.8 MOTIVATION THEORIES

In community of practice theory, motivation is intrinsic, initially created by being accepted into a community as a legitimate participant and maintained throughout the learning journey by working with masters and incrementally building knowledge and confidence (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Whilst this is one scenario, motivation is complex, so in practice the reality could be quite different. To understand this phenomenon, it is useful to understand the different types of motivation and consider their effect on a learner at each stage of their journey. One of the most influential theories is Richard Ryan and Edward Deci's work examining motivation, which led to self-determination theory (SDT), published in the 1980s (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Ryan and Deci (2017) state that there are two kinds of motivation. The first is autonomous motivation, which is about willingness to be involved, leading to interest, enjoyment and value. If someone acts autonomously they agree with what they are doing, i.e. I do it willingly, I do it volitionally and I stand behind what I did. Then there is controlled motivation, which is doing something to get some reward, or avoid punishment; maybe because of feeling pressured or obliged to do it. SDT states that performance and engagement are enhanced if someone is autonomously motivated. Further, individuals whose need for competence, autonomy and relatedness are met through interactions with others, mentors and peers for example, will be more self-determined in their intention to achieve (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

There is a middle ground, which is common in education, where students or learners might enjoy their programme of study and are motivated to achieve the end goal of a degree, but do

not enjoy some of the topics or tasks that are necessary to develop self-efficacy. In this case they can perform extrinsically motivated actions with a positive attitude that "reflects an inner acceptance of the value or utility of a task" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 55). The satisfaction comes from the extrinsic consequences to which the activity leads (Gagné & Deci, 2005). With this in mind, Ryan and Deci (2000) suggest that for successful outcomes, tutors need to understand how and when to use active and volitional, rather than passive and controlling forms of extrinsic motivation.

Ryan and Deci (2017) propose that the fulfilment of three basic innate psychological needs are necessary for optimal human activity to achieve tasks. They are also central to community of practice theory, being:

- **Competence**: to feel confident and effective in relation to whatever you are doing, developing self-efficacy through participation and practice.
- **Relatedness**: to feel cared for by others, to care for others and feel a sense of belonging.
- **Autonomy**: a feeling of choice that can be observed and endorsed by one's behaviour.

It was found that of the three motivational factors, feeling competent is most important as it enhances self-efficacy, giving a sense that one can succeed and grow (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This appears to correspond with the findings from the learner research, as 99% of the completers developed self-efficacy and confidence as they gained occupationally relevant skills that led to many being promoted or receiving pay rises. The loyalty expressed by completers toward their employers, with 80% planning to carry on working for the same employer after finishing their learning programme, demonstrates a sense of belonging.

Self-efficacy and belonging are two motivational themes that have been identified in education as being key to persistence by educational theorists. Bandura (1989) describes self-efficacy as an individual's perception of his or her ability to achieve certain outcomes. He states that two of the most influential sources of self-efficacy are the result of one's previous performance and receiving positive feedback while undertaking a complex task, as this encourages a person to believe that they can succeed. Schunk (1995) discusses how the factors that people derive from information about how they are performing can enhance motivation and self-efficacy, leading to them performing more competently and skilfully and enhancing their sense of achievement. The results from the learner survey found that a sense of achievement from early successes was one of the most important motivational factors,

which encouraged learners to believe that they could succeed (Kantar Public, 2019). Bandura (1986) talks of the speed of recovery from self-doubt being key, because the acquisition of knowledge and competence requires sustained effort in the face of setbacks, as this resilience is crucial to motivation and achievement. Bean and Eaton (2002, p. 75) developed a psychological model of retention that positioned self-efficacy assessments as one of the most important factors that affect academic and social motivation: "Do I have confidence that I can perform well here?" They go on to assert that when learners believe they are competent they gain self-confidence and develop higher levels of achievement.

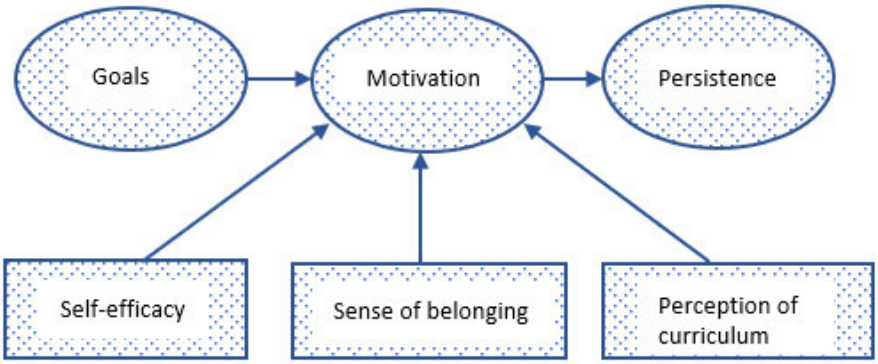
Many factors influence a sense of belonging, including past experience, gender, socio economic status, race and ethnicity (Guiffrida et al., 2013). Baumeister and Leary (1995) state that a sense of belonging is a fundamental human motivation that has strong effects on emotional patterns and cognitive processes; conversely, a lack of attachment is linked to issues affecting health and wellbeing. Regular and positive relational interactions are important to create the motivation sufficient to drive behaviour (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In their study of computing degree apprentices, Taylor-Smith et al. (2019) comment on providing social activities to encourage a sense of belonging for their computing learners, including providing Pizza lunches. It was recognised that these apprentices did not receive a traditional university experience as they attended university one day each week, so this social event was used to develop the cohort as a learning community.

Given the high dropout rate, especially within the first few months of the CMDA, there appears to be an imperative to engage learners and begin to develop self-efficacy and belonging as early as possible in their learning programme. Engagement and involvement have a direct impact on a sense of belonging and intent to persist (Tovar, 2013). Kuh (2009) describes engagement as the amount of time and effort that learners invest in educationally beneficial practices, but also refers to the efforts that institutions must invest in these activities to retain students by supporting self-efficacy and belonging. Wolf-Wendel et al. (2009, p. 26) agree and state that engagement has two parts: "what a student does and what the institution does." In other words, it is a supported educational experience between two parties. This definition is equally applicable to work-based learners as it is to traditional students, but with the additional employer relationship to consider. Although many learners believe they can succeed when they begin their apprenticeship, others have doubts about their ability, especially those who may have no previous experience of higher education (Kantar Public, 2019). Therefore, the challenge for universities is not only to help learners achieve the

required standard of academic skills, but also support their belief in their ability to succeed (Tinto, 2017).

In his 2017 study, Through the Eyes of Students, Tinto (2017), proposes a model of motivation and achievement shown in figure 8. Like Kuh (2009) and (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009), Tinto asks universities what they are doing to improve retention, asking them to view the institution, or learning programme through the eyes of students who do not seek to be retained but seek to persist. Tinto agrees with Ryan and Deci (2017), Bandura (1989) and Baumeister and Leary (1995) that a student's motivation to persist and achieve their learning goal is through a combination of self-efficacy, a sense of belonging and their perception of the curriculum. He describes motivation as malleable, highlighting factors within the capacity of institutions to influence that may enhance or diminish a student's experience (Tinto, 2017). The implication from his model and description of its purpose is that although support of different kinds is available, universities are reactive rather than adopting early warning systems that would inform a planned proactive and differentiated, rather than generalised approach to providing student support.

Figure 8: Tinto's model of student motivation and persistence



Source: Reproduced from Tinto (2017)

He explains his model by starting with a student's learning goal, which can vary in character and intensity. A lack of clarity can affect completion as if they are not committed to their programme of study this will lead them to question the time and effort they are investing. For a degree apprentice, who has to balance work responsibilities alongside study, without clarity and a clear view of their future imagined identity, other priorities could affect their

motivation to persist. Tinto encourages universities to spend time with candidates prior to enrolment, providing guidance to make sure that choices are well informed.

Tinto asserts that students have to believe in their ability to succeed otherwise they will see little reason in continuing, stating "self-efficacy is the foundation on which persistence is built" (Tinto, 2017, p. 275). For universities, he suggests that student self-efficacy cannot be assumed and a capacity to develop must be built by providing support programmes that improve performance. Advising of the importance of recognising that challenges to self-efficacy can affect all students, even those that enter a programme confident in their ability to succeed, he points to the first year as being critical, as students face challenges that may weaken their confidence. Tinto states that no support is more important to retention than early academic support, which enhances a learner's sense of self efficacy, reduces stress and increases the chances of subsequent success. He suggests that early warning systems should be established to help those learners that struggle, as if left unaddressed this will lead to an erosion of self-efficacy, undermining performance and motivation. Acknowledging that this is no easy task, he suggests that on entry procedures can help early identification of those entering a programme academically unprepared. It should be recognised that their success is dependent on a belief that they are able to succeed (Hall & Ponton, 2005).

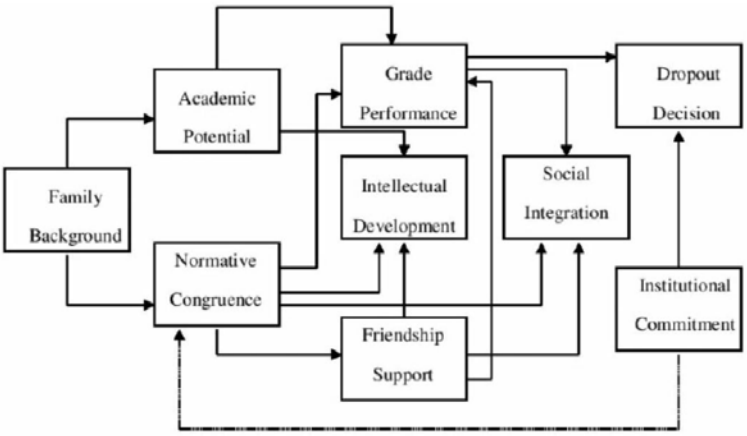
Tinto (2017) states that self-efficacy and believing in one's ability to succeed is not enough and students need to feel part of a community that includes peers and staff who value their participation. If successful, he states that the bond created is often expressed as a commitment which binds an individual to a group or community and is directly related to motivation and persistence. Tinto (2017, p. 261) acknowledges that "a sense of belonging is shaped by a complex array of forces." He suggests that from induction, promoting activities that require shared academic and social experiences can help to create belongingness, especially for those who find the programme challenging.

Finally, Tinto encourages universities to be explicit in demonstrating how the curriculum can be applied to meaningful situations. Perceptions of the curriculum are shaped by the value of what students are being asked to learn and whether it is appropriate to their career goal (Frick et al., 2009). With a programme such as the CMDA this can be challenging, especially for public sector employees, as subjects such as marketing and finance can appear alien, if they are focussed only on private sector practice.

2.8.1 Theoretical models of learner persistence and retention

There are many models of student retention in a traditional university environment that seek to explain how motivation can be enhanced or diminished. Models provide theoretical direction, but also assist in adapting practice to accommodate new or different approaches to learning, including early learner integration (Zepke & Leach, 2005). Burke (2019) states that two are regarded as seminal works, namely, the undergraduate dropout process model (Spady, 1970), and the institutional departure model (Tinto, 1975). Spady and Tinto's models are grounded in sociology using two environmental factors as the basis for their theories: integration with the academic and social systems of a university. Integration with both were considered as essential for persistence, with the factors that enhanced or diminished student motivation to integrate being highlighted in their models. Their theories were based on Durkheim's theory of suicide, who argued that suicide is a result of an individual's failure to integrate into the fabric of society due to the dissonance of values (Bean & Eaton, 2002; Tinto, 1975, p. 91). Spady's model shown in figure 9 comprises factors such as student background, academic performance and development, friendship support and institutional commitment. His model implies that a decision to withdraw is based on a lack of successful integration into student life and the university, determined by social and academic factors.

Figure 9: Spady's undergraduate dropout process model

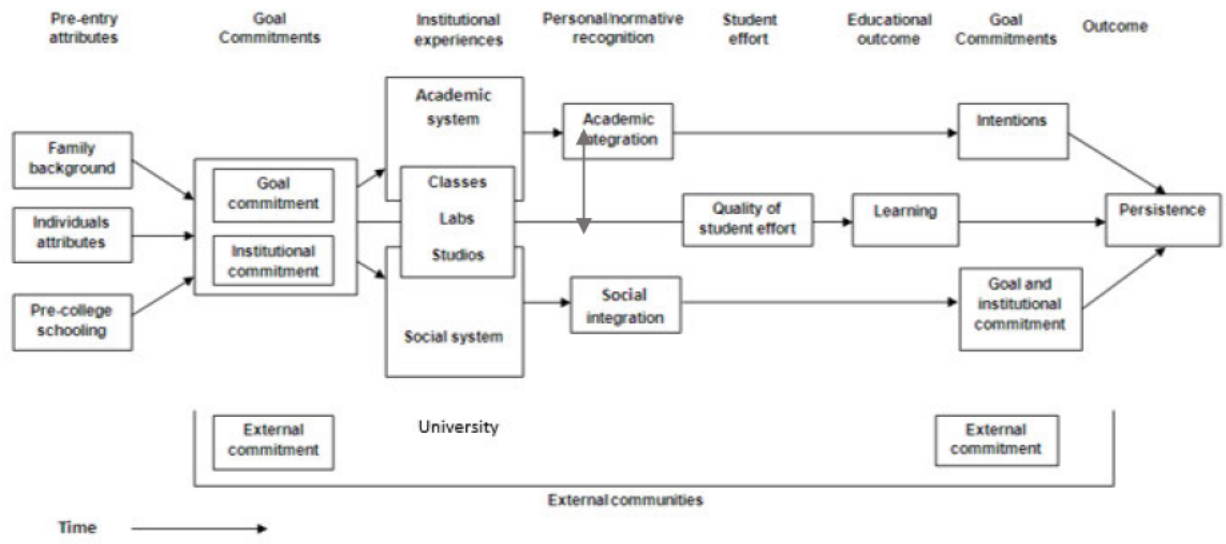


Source: Spady (1970)

Tinto's model shown in figure 10 is the most often cited and perhaps the most well accepted (Burke, 2019). His theory of student departure achieved a dominance which Zepke and Leach (2005) describe as hegemonic. It has been tested and reviewed regularly since the first iteration appeared in 1975. His model of dropout behaviour presumes a student's background

and personal characteristics determine their ability to integrate into the learning environment and interact with others, which affects their social and academic outcomes (Burke, 2019). He believed that certain characteristics affected a student's pre-enrolment commitment to both their goal and to the institution. These characteristics include; individual attributes such as race, gender and academic ability; pre-college experiences including social and academic success at school, and family background including social status, values and expectations.

Figure 10: Tinto's revised model of student attrition

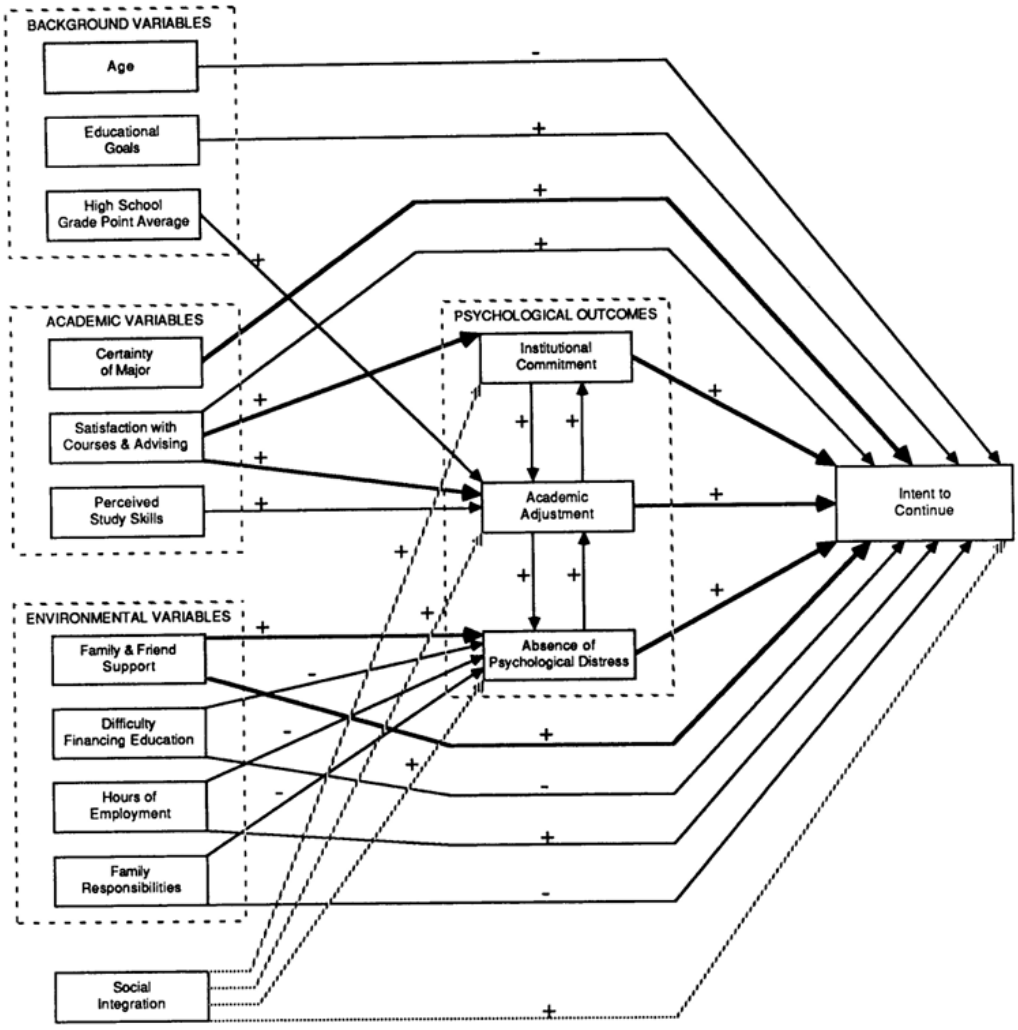


Source: Reproduced from Tinto (1997)

There are many studies that support, or partially support Tinto's theory (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), but there have also been criticisms including Bean (1980) who argued that none of the previous models are testable with a direct correlation. Rovai (2003) felt that these models did not translate to other modes of study. He published a paper which discussed the model in relation to distance learning and points to Bean and Metzner (1985) who developed the student attrition model (SAM), that considered the external conditions that affected non-traditional student persistence (figure 11). Factors included family background and other commitments such as employment, as they believed that Tinto did not consider older students, or those who did not live on campus. Bean and Metzner (1985) believed that older students have their own support networks and less likely to need intra-university social and academic integration. However, Yorke and Longden (2008) found this was not the case. In

their study of 462 new first year students, respondents who were 'commuter students' felt that making friends and peer group support was an essential part of a positive higher education experience and achieving this was difficult for them.

Figure 11: The Bean and Metzner model of non-traditional student attrition



Source: Reproduced from Chartrand (1992)

Models of persistence have been produced for use in most academic settings, including traditional undergraduate, distance learning, on line and part time. No models of persistence or motivation have been created for work-based learning, so this study aims to create such a model, grounded in sociology. This will provide the University with an operational model, or reference, to plan apprenticeship programmes and anticipate dropout. It will be based on

Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory, the findings from the literature review and developed further by including the outcomes from the field work.

2.9 THE WORK BASED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

A degree apprenticeship involves a relationship between the learner, their employer and the provider university, which needs to be effective and active (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2013). Collaboration between universities, employers and professional bodies such as the CMI is becoming widely accepted as best practice for delivering effective and sustainable programmes (Lester, 2020; Mulkeen et al., 2019). Not having enough involvement and communication with their provider is an area of dissatisfaction for employers (IFF research, 2022). However, encouragingly, there is evidence that employers would like a closer working relationship, but there is anxiety about delivering the required quality (Mulkeen et al., 2019).

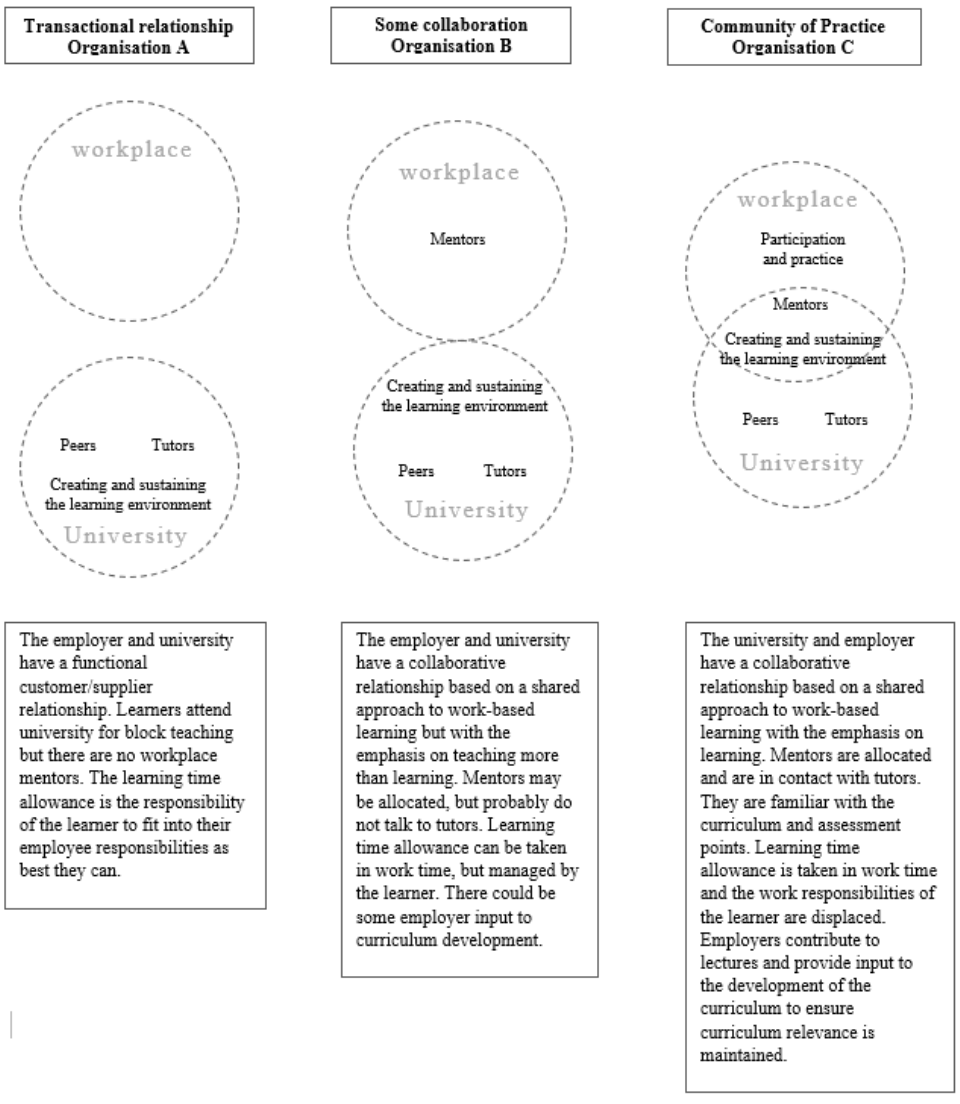
The relationship is complex, as the employer and the university are both responsible for creating and sustaining the learning environment and for a learner's experience and progress. This requires the expectations, processes and lines of communication of the two institutions to be aligned, ideally embodied in a strategic partnership arrangement (Lester, 2020). This is essential as there are imbalances in the partnership that need to be recognised by both parties. Whereas the university is responsible for the overall quality of the learning programme, the power is predominantly in the hands of the employer who 'owns' the learner and therefore the extent and quality of their access to participation, practice and resources (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

2.9.1 Creating and sustaining the learning environment

Case studies carried out by Fuller et al. (2005) exemplify the variation in practice through three case studies that described the experiences of apprentices and relationship between the employer and their training partner which varied widely. In one example, apprentices benefit from a mature, highly structured and supported learning environment, where apprentices spend their first year in a college-based community, defined by the practice of learning and being taught, before moving into the workplace. In this organisation, past apprentices have been promoted to become directors. This relationship/learning environment is represented as organisation C in figure 12. In another example, that of a business administration learner, the apprenticeship was loosely planned and managed. During the apprenticeship the learner was

moved from one department to another as the company's perspective was that it was easier to relocate an apprentice than a permanent employee, regardless of the disruption to the learning programme. This relationship/learning environment is represented as organisation A in figure 11. Fuller et al. (2005) uses these examples to demonstrate that learning trajectories to full participation can be different to those presented by (Lave & Wenger, 1991), as the quality of workplace learning is in the hands of the employer.

Figure 12: An interpretation of three employer/university relationships on a spectrum, where a transactional relationship exists at one end and a Community of Practice at the other



Source: Based on Fuller 2005 case studies of the nature and process of learning at work.

In the three studies by Fuller et al. (2005), the issue of power was central to understanding the opportunities and barriers to learning, stating that those with control over resources can "use

their power to create or remove barriers that facilitate or inhibit participation." (Fuller et al., 2005, p. 66). Like Roberts (2006), Fuller et al. (2005) comment that Lave and Wenger (1991) acknowledge but never fully explore the significance of power relations in communities of practice, but it has a pivotal role to play in creating and maintaining the learning environment. One aspect of apprenticeship learning where this issue can arise is time allowed for off the job training. The learning time allowance that should be protected (which includes time at university) is a particular aspect of apprenticeship learning where power can be exerted by managers over degree apprentices (Powell, 2019). This is particularly relevant where apprenticeships are not seen as a strategic activity by the employer (Lester, 2020). Without the employer allowing time for learning, learner engagement in academic practice can prove to be challenging, as highlighted in the learner survey (Kantar Public, 2019).

Fabian et al. (2021) noted that an apprenticeship is not simply an award that can be completed in the evenings and weekends, but many busy professionals with work-life-study challenges are most at risk of treating the apprenticeship as a part time course. They state that the positive influence of power could be asserted by employers as part of their commitment to apprenticeship learning. Employers should plan the learning time allowance into their employee learner's workload so it does not simply displace the day's work to the apprentice's own time. Lester (2020) comments that apprenticeships are not always well thought through, in particular how they fit with an organisation's aims and day to day operations. This can be particularly problematic if apprentices are drawn from existing staff, which is a common feature of degree apprenticeships (Fabian et al., 2021; IFF research, 2022). Day to day pressures can overshadow the learning aspects of the apprenticeship leading to limited, or no off the job learning, due to a conflict between worker and learner roles/identity (Lester, 2020). As 'masters', employers should align apprenticeships with increasing productivity and achieving strategic objectives, then regularly check that the apprentice is on track. The employer's role is not finished when permission is given for the member of staff to join the programme (Lester, 2020). Apprentices felt these issues could be overcome if employers were more involved with the university from the outset, so that workload and course content could be aligned (Kantar Public, 2019).

2.9.2 Degree apprenticeship design and pedagogical principles

A notable conflict and probably the only real difference between the main principles of community of practice theory when applying them to current practice, is the authors dismissal

of formal education, stating that "in apprenticeship, opportunities for learning are more often than not, given structure by work practices instead of by strongly asymmetrical master-apprentice relations" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 93). Fuller et al. (2005) took issue with this position, feeling the authors were overly dismissive of teaching in the workplace. They felt that it was reflective of teaching and learning at the time they were writing, but point to the work done by educationists such as Engeström (1994) and Billett (2020) to improve workplace education by creating workplace pedagogy and learning environments to support it. Rather than criticising Lave and Wenger, Fuller et al. (2005) believe their work supports their own assertion that learning takes place through participation as a social enterprise and extends it by drawing attention to the role that teaching now plays in workplace learning (Fuller et al., 2005). Hughes et al. (2007, p. 39) encourages educationalists to continue the discussion about workplace learning and not replace "a one-sided view with another, equally one-sided version: from one in which formal education in schools is privileged as the guiding metaphor for learning to another in which the same is true of apprenticeship." In his later work Wenger's opinion on teaching changed, devoting considerable time to researching the integration of academic study and work-based practice (Wenger et al., 2015). Although Jean Lave's opinion appears to soften in her later work, she maintains her resistance to talk about teaching, preferring instead to talk about learning as the predominant focus of her work (Berkeley Graduate Division, 2011).

When considering the conditions needed for sustainable degree apprenticeships, Lester (2020) reported an increasing recognition that just repackaging existing degree programmes into an apprenticeship does not work. This he states, is because work-based learning is a field of learning in its own right, with apprentices being active agents and creators of meaning. Also, their workplace is a place of learning and knowledge, production and application (Bravenboer & Workman, 2016; Costley & Armsby, 2007). This was found to be the case by Lester (2020) in his study of degree apprenticeships. One of the examples that featured in the interviews was an engineering programme that had been based on a full-time bachelor's degree. When the apprenticeship was being designed, it was decided to leave the content largely unchanged. This resulted in employer criticism due to the difficulty integrating institutional and workplace learning, lack of resources for individual support and the academic work not being timed to link to workplace activity. Programme creation places a responsibility on the university to ensure that the pedagogical, or andragogical programme

design recognises that CMDA learners are probably already managers, having to complete the programme alongside their responsibility as an employee and within the learning time allowance (Lester, 2020). Failure to design the programme from the bottom up, taking into account an apprentice's employee responsibilities and the probability that they could be non-traditional learners, risks an individual becoming overwhelmed, possibly before they have completed the first module, leading to early withdrawal.

2.9.3 Mentor support

Whilst the peer relationship is a multifaceted support structure spanning work and wellbeing both inside and outside the work context, the role of the mentor is work focussed. Roberts et al. (2019, p. 10) state that: "Where mentoring works well, it exemplifies the positive view of the learning potential of a community of practice." Formal employer led mentoring has been found to enhance the development of professional skills in the workplace (Metso & Kianto, 2014). Factors that detract from mentoring being successful and learners becoming disengaged include a general lack of workplace support (Chan, 2013) and a lack of understanding of the apprenticeship programme curriculum, which supports the assertion that a working relationship with the provider university is an important aspect (Roberts et al., 2019). Rowe et al. (2017) comment that for CMDA learners, compressing a level 6 programme and their full-time management role is challenging, which makes high quality workplace support, including effective mentoring, crucial to learner development and successful completion. In a study by Fabian et al. (2021), it was recommended that employers should adjust the workload of mentors to accommodate this activity. Universities should play their part to ensure appropriate mentoring support is provided, however, it can be difficult for universities to ensure that appropriate support is in place, as they can only advise an employer of the need for a mentor (Rowe et al., 2017).

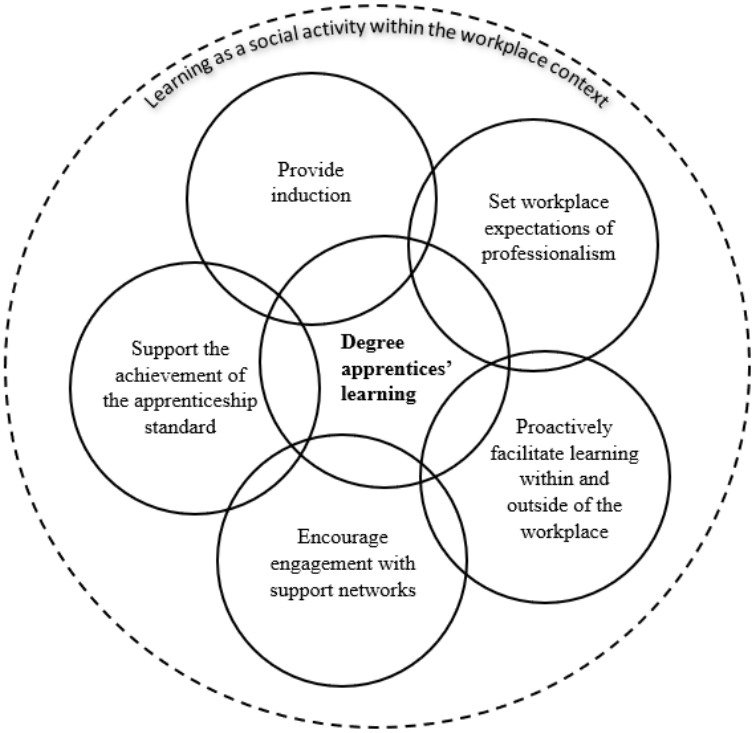
In a study of stakeholder perceptions Mulkeen et al. (2019) found that employers were anxious about entering formalised and assessed work-based learning for the first time. Of particular concern was their ability to develop a competent group of work-based mentors that could support individuals to degree level, ensuring that their partner university's quality expectation had been met within the workplace. A survey carried out by Curtis (2017) confirmed this view, but from the perspective of the employees that are responsible for carrying out training in the workplace. This survey found that 97% of those surveyed wanted training to be made available, as they were not confident about becoming a mentor.

Encouragingly, there is evidence to suggest that employers, especially those new to degree apprenticeships, would welcome a closer relationship with their university colleagues, including mentor training, to help their staff to support apprentices (Mulkeen et al., 2019; Rowe et al., 2017; Saville et al., 2020).

There are a range of mentoring delivery models available, depending on the size of the organisation and nature of the apprenticeship (Hirst et al., 2014). Bean and Eaton (2001) state that a mentor can be a sounding board, encouraging a learner to try new ways of looking at the task in hand and by doing this can contribute to a student's self-efficacy and build self-confidence. Schunk (1995) supports mentoring but using peers that are further advanced in their studies than their mentees. He describes this as 'peers as models', but warns against mentoring that involves extensive assistance as this will not raise self-efficacy. He suggests that learners must involve themselves in periods of independent practice to develop skills.

Hirst et al. (2014) state that it is important to define the role of a mentor within the context of a specific apprenticeship. CMDA degree apprenticeship mentoring reflects the master/LPP relationship proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991), not so much as a time served expert in the subject, but facilitating access to practice and organisational relationships. In this way, a mentor can help the apprentice to see the bigger picture and support them to achieve their imagined future, through the development of their professional identity and gaining the necessary competencies (Chan, 2016; Roberts et al., 2019). In a study of mentoring CMDA learners in a post-92 university, it was found that the majority of mentoring activity centred on making sure that learning took place in line with the learning programmes expectations, so acting as a coordinator rather than an instructor (Roberts et al., 2019). This included learning inside and outside the organisation, alongside the development of a professional identity. As can be seen in figure 13, their mentoring model recognises and supports learning as a social activity, but like Chan (2013) and Lave and Wenger (1991) point out the importance of the organisational context needed for successful mentoring, which is one that values learning. The study concluded that the results generally supported the validity of the model. It is interesting to note that the role of the mentor is not one of instruction, but of supporting learning (Roberts et al., 2019).

Figure 13: A model for mentoring degree apprentices



Source: Reproduced from Roberts et al. (2019).

2.9.4 The interrelationship between university and work

In Learning in Landscapes of Practice, Wenger reviews the academic/workplace boundary and learner trajectories, as learners "face the challenge of negotiating multiple boundaries … between the academic and workplace context" (Wenger et al., 2015, p. 43). To illustrate this point, he uses the example of work-based learners passing through university, understanding that their trajectory will take them through the academic community as part of a journey to full participation in their chosen career. Wenger introduces a classification of participation depending upon how learners engage with the practices of the academic community. He calls work-based learners 'visitors' to the academic environment, describing them as having a detached relationship with their university and divides them into two categories as shown in table 6. This corresponds with a study by Bishop and Hordern (2017) of aerospace and construction degree apprentices, finding these apprentices to have 'an arm's length' relationship with their university.

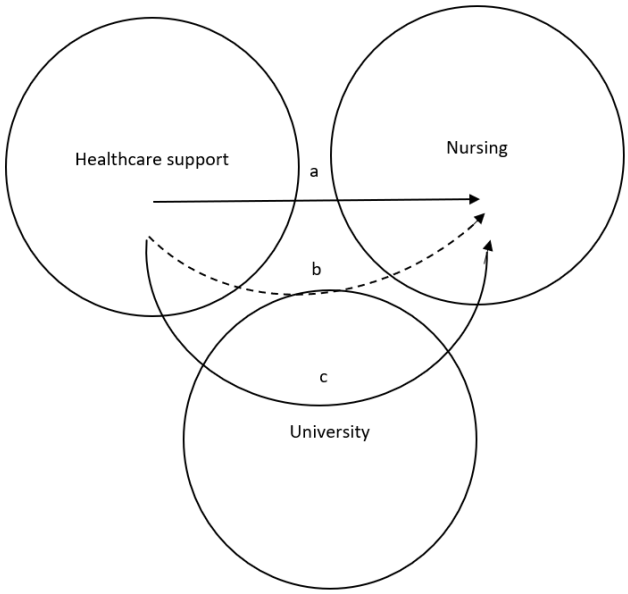
Table 6: Learner trajectories

Category	Description
Tourists	• Low levels of participation with superficial engagement in academic practices. • No real change in identity from the experience and the academic world is a 'foreign country'.
Sojourners	• Higher level of participation than tourists resulting in changes to identity, but not aimed at assimilation within the academic community. • Accommodate academic practices and the regime of competence in order to function within and beyond the academic community.

Source: Wenger et al. (2015)

Wenger does not regard the sojourner as a problem, but "a profound opportunity for learning" (Wenger et al., 2015, p. 45). The aim of the sojourners work is not particularly assimilation within the academic community, as this is partial and provisional, but unlike the tourist, the sojourner does engage with the academic to build an understanding of practices and develops competence to function effectively within the profession to which they aspire. Wenger et al. (2015) expressed this graphically in a chart he calls 'student trajectories' using nursing as an example, although he states that it could be adapted to other categories of learners. Figure 14, line (a) shows the workplace transition from healthcare worker to qualified nurse. Line (b) represents the tourist route, engaging superficially in academic practice, but with no engagement in the meaning of these practices. Line (c) represents the sojourner. Their participation is provisional and temporary but they have a deeper commitment to the meaning of academic practice and therefore to the practice of nursing.

Figure 14: Learner trajectories



Source: reproduced from Landscapes of Learning (Wenger et al., 2015)

There is no mention of successful completion or failure attached to the labels of sojourner or tourist, but Wenger does imply that tourists might be less successful practitioners if they do not grasp the importance of the body of knowledge that a professional practitioner requires, which includes both the practical and ideological (Wenger et al., 2015). Using Wenger's categorisation of learners as tourists or sojourners is a useful way to conceptualise degree apprentices, their journey and their motivation. It accepts that these learners are a heterogenous group having to deal with multiple challenges while passing through university as visitors in pursuit of their imagined futures. These challenges are echoed in other studies of degree apprentices (Bishop & Hordern, 2017; Rowe et al., 2017).

In a study of computing degree apprentices, Fabian et al. (2021) used Q methodology, which combines qualitative and quantitative methods, to investigate the subjective views of respondents (Herrington & Coogan, 2011). Three categories of learner were identified. Two corresponded with Wenger's categorisations, being 'aligned student-workers' (sojourners) and 'busy professionals' (tourists), but there was a third category of learner that was not identified by Wenger, being 'cast adrift', which speaks for itself. This study added an important dimension to this study as it provided more details about learners in a degree apprenticeship, where unlike a nursing degree, achievement of the qualification is not a requirement to practice, so therefore could affect a learner's motivation to persist. A degree is

a prerequisite to work as a nurse, therefore successful completion of the learning programme is essential for an individual to realise their imagined future identity (Royal College of Nursing, 2023). The CMDA, like the computing degree apprenticeship, is not a requirement of employment, however it does demonstrate professional competence (Chartered Management Institute, 2020a).

A description of the three categories, or personas, found by Fabien follows:
Aligned student-workers (sojourners) demonstrated a positive and coherent work-study experience. They were given time by their employer to complete classwork and had regular meetings with their mentor(s). This group had a strong sense of belonging to their employing organisation, but also a strong alignment between work and study through coursework and their working practice. Fabian et al. (2021) proposes that this organisational belonging can support performance.

Busy professionals (tourists) strongly identified as workers and professionals. They appeared to be happy to take their professional identity to the university, but did not like to take their learner identity to the workplace. For example, they did not like the regular academic review that takes place at work. Even so, they did enjoy study, but prioritised work. They found the work/study balance challenging, to the point where they spent their own time catching up with course work. They found the 20% off the job requirement difficult to achieve, which indicates that their mentor/employer was not close enough to the learner to spot this happening and intervene, or did not understand the expectations of the programme.

Cast adrift learners were those that did not receive much support in the workplace from mentors or colleagues, although they did receive support from the university. This group lacked a sense of belonging to their organisation and a sense of professional identity, which has been found to reduce job performance. Fabian et al. (2021) suggested that this group would benefit from the support of a trained mentor.

2.9.5 Learner engagement with academic practice

Sylvia Jones in Wenger et al. (2015), carried out a textual analysis of 40 nurses and their experience of workplace and university study. It provides insights into the transitional challenges faced by learners, especially non-traditional learners. The profile of the nurse's class resembled that of a typical CMDA group as the majority had no first degree, were older, predominantly women and had not been in formal education for many years, but they did

have extensive work experience (Chartered Management Institute, 2020a; Wenger et al., 2015). Her study examined the problems these nurses faced, dealing with unfamiliar practices in the academic community.

Sylvia Jones described the beginning of the learner journey and the difficulty that many of the nursing students faced trying to connect the academic content of their programme to their day to day jobs on the ward. Some found expressing their thoughts using academic practice and discipline particularly challenging as they lacked confidence, for example in using the correct grammar. Some could not understand the relationship between the curriculum and the practical application of nursing, especially at the beginning of the programme. For many the struggle they had with academic literacies made them anxious as they "grappled with academic writing and unfamiliar modes of expression" (Wenger et al., 2015, p. 49). The introduction to their learning identity was expressed by the student nurses as initial "learning shock", as they first became subject to a different definition of competence than that of their work environment and where their commitment was highly provisional (Wenger et al., 2015, p. 57). The difference between the workplace and academic domains and the way competence is expressed in each produced tension. Some questioned what the curriculum had to do with nursing as it appeared to go into levels of details that in their view was more concerned with diagnosis. They saw themselves as carers rather than abstract thinkers, so expressing their competence by describing modes of care rather than enacting them was hard at first. In a similar study in the health sector, Lester (2020) found that older nurses, or those out of formal education for some time, or did not do well at school, struggled with academic practice including assignment composition and evidencing. Unless misalignment between a learner's imagined identity and reality is addressed early on in the learning programme, it could cause a problem, as it might lead to non-participation and withdrawal (Chan, 2016).

Wenger et al. (2015) comments that most students came onto the nursing programme with the intention of developing their knowledge and competence. The knowledge they sought was indeed there, integrated into the course design, but they had to engage at a deeper level and in a broader context to understand the intrinsic value. Successfully negotiating this stage, as early as possible in the learning programme, builds the confidence and competence to engage with others, such as senior clinical and administrational staff, that work at the boundaries of a nurse's landscape of practice (Kantar Public, 2019; Wenger et al., 2015). The ability or willingness to engage in academic practice played a defining role in whether the learner became a tourist or sojourner and was influential to their changing professional identity. In a study of degree

apprentices' perceptions, Fabian et al. (2021) found that the well-established professional identities of learners evolved as they began to succeed in their studies due to enhanced confidence and the grounding in theory.

Lester (2020) comments on the part that degree apprenticeships play in social mobility, with some (especially older) nurses commenting that without the degree apprenticeship they would not have been able to progress from a healthcare assistant to a qualified nurse. In a survey of degree apprenticeship motivation Engeli and Turner (2019) found that more than one in ten respondents would not have engaged in higher education if the degree apprenticeship was not available. Widening participation students have more significant weaknesses on entering degree apprenticeships (Whiteford et al., 2013), so engaging with academic practice could be challenging for this group. Early dropout, described in the introduction to this study, is a concerning feature, which could be connected to a learner's ability to engage, particularly those with little or no previous higher education experience. Supporting learners to engage at a deeper level and in a broader context as early as possible, to understand the intrinsic value in their programme of study and achieve early success, could be key to retention.

Critical reflection was found to play a valuable part in the student nurses' transition (Wenger et al., 2015). Creating space to make sense of what they had learnt was important, either with other learners in their community of practice, where they could discuss what they had been learning using their own language, or by using an individual learning log (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Musker (2011) concurs. In her study of nursing students, she comments on the imperative to create space for reflection to help bridge the theory-practice gap when integrating academic and work-based learning. Fuller and Unwin (2003) propose that opportunities for reflection and boundary crossing can assist a learner's identity development. In a study of CMDA learners by Konstantinou and Miller (2020), there was a module specifically for reflection built into the curriculum and the benefit of reflection was noted. At the beginning of the apprenticeship programme some learners could not see the benefit of the coursework. However, learners commented that reflection and the ability to critically evaluate what might be successful or not in a particular context helped them to express themselves more clearly and more broadly in academic practice, such as essay writing. Learners also talked about how it helped in the workplace, highlighting their increasing confidence, for example in talking to senior managers in their own organisations. Reflection helped as they progressed through the levels of the programme as they were able to appreciate the impact that their coursework had on the quality of their workplace practice.

2.9.6 Predisposition and its effect on identity and participation

It was stated earlier when discussing the key characteristics of the Theory that Roberts (2006) challenged Wenger's position that meaning is negotiated in communities of practice by comparing it to Bourdieu's notion of habitus (Bourdieu, 1990). Bourdieu argues that habitus involves the conditioning of an individual through modes of thought that unconsciously develop over time; they are resistant to change and transferable between situations. It was noted that legitimate peripheral participants are not all tabula rasa as Lave and Wenger (1991) position them, as many bring considerable work experience into their learner identity and consider themselves to be employees rather than learners (Fabian et al., 2021; Kantar Public, 2019). In practice, this experience could result in a predisposition that could affect how a learner engages with the learning programme, reinforced by how they are treated by their employer (as employees rather than learners).

A study of degree apprentices by Taylor-Smith et al. (2019) found that their employee identity was important to learners. They considered themselves as employees even when at university, as their employers paid their salaries and they drew on their employee identity as a strength. Bishop and Hordern (2017) found degree apprenticeship learners consider themselves a distinct group and not interested in the wider student experience, having a detached relationship with their university. Given the precondition of some learners joining a degree apprenticeship programme, i.e. those identifying as busy professionals, if the university does not plan to engage the learner from day one and maintain their motivation to persist, the risk is that the learner is drawn to the comfort zone of their employee identity and may disengage or treat the apprenticeship as a part time course (Lester, 2020).

An organisations cultural predisposition to learning is equally important as the predisposition of the learner. Lave and Wenger acknowledge that the environment in which a community of practice is formed fundamentally affects its ability and that of its members to thrive. They state "any given attempt to analyse a form of learning through legitimate peripheral participation must involve analysis of the political and social organisation of that form, its historical development, and the effects of both of these on sustained possibilities for learning" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 64). This brief but intelligent advice applies when evaluating the potential to create and sustain a community of practice within any given organisation or setting.

In an interview with Farnsworth et al. (2016), Wenger urges caution when using Bourdieu's theory (Bourdieu, 1990) in relation to communities of practice. He accepts that the two theories are closely related, but warns that one must be careful when bringing theories together. He accepts that predispositions are part of the process of identity formation, but he insists that they have different purposes (Farnsworth et al., 2016). He explains this as a tension between Bourdieu's use of the concept as a generative structure that conditions practice and his own focus on structures that emerge from practice (Farnsworth et al., 2016).

2.9.7 Selection and recruitment practice

Recognising the transitional challenges faced by many learners, especially non-traditional learners, recruitment strategies play a key role. As described earlier in curriculum design, degree apprenticeships are a field in their own right and learners bring their own lived experiences into their learning. Therefore, Rowe et al. (2017) point out that it seems to be appropriate that recruitment procedures specific to degree apprenticeships should be developed, rather than adapting current admissions processes. They draw attention to the critical importance of effective recruitment strategies when hiring new members of staff, suggesting that the same care needs to be applied when selecting candidates for management degree apprenticeship programmes.

When it comes to candidate selection, employers hold the power to confer legitimacy on suitably qualified new recruits or existing employees, enabling them to join the CMDA programme. Then, through its pre-entry processes the university should put into place, where needed, the appropriate level of support to ensure that learners successfully complete the programme. Two recruitment practices have emerged that appear to be suitable for degree apprenticeships (Lester, 2020). The first being a decision-making process based on an institution/employer agreement that satisfies the needs of the employer, the university and where relevant the professional body (Lillis & Bravenboer, 2020). This appears to be the most widely used process and is used by the University of Gloucestershire. The other practice is recognitional or strength-based (SBA) adopted by Aston University (Bravenboer, 2013; Saville et al., 2020), which places the emphasis on potential to succeed rather than qualifications.

Aston university took the opportunity to rethink their approach to recruitment, learning and support with non-traditional learners in mind when degree apprenticeships were introduced into the curriculum, as this was Aston's predominant recruitment demographic. Due to their

location in Birmingham, the University has a high proportion of learners from diverse backgrounds (Saville et al., 2020). The team at Aston agreed with Leese (2010) and Rowe et al. (2017), that it is the responsibility of institutions to respond and adapt to the needs of the non-traditional learner and not apply the same method of assessment used in traditional undergraduate programmes. This prompted the strength-based approach to recruitment for their engineering degree apprenticeships, which involved working in close collaboration with employers. There were challenges that Aston had to overcome internally and externally, including designing curricula and assessment based on the strengths and skills required, rather than using university mandated learning outcomes (Saville et al., 2020).

Saville et al. (2020) found that SBA built confidence and the motivation necessary for achievement and persistence by teaching learners how to apply their strengths to new and maybe challenging learning situations (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005). Regarding outcomes, over 91 per cent of apprentices graduated with a 2:1 or above and only two students, or less than 1%, withdrew from the course. Saville et al. (2020) reported that these successful outcomes were the result of a combination of the SBA led curriculum, the curriculum being relevant and 'wholesome pastoral care'. This care included skills coaches, or mentors, working with employers and learners in the workplace, not just to simply monitor progress but to help learners relate what they are being taught to their everyday life (Saville et al., 2020).

Although (Lester, 2020) describes strength-based assessment (SBA) as an admissions process, which is valid, it is but one part of an approach that Saville et al. (2020) describes as necessary to support SBA. The study involved a significant number of learners and the preliminary results demonstrated its effectiveness, but transferability should be carefully considered. There are three principal reasons for this. First, Aston's recruitment demographics are very different to the University of Gloucestershire. Second, the study was completed using engineering learners/employers, so remains untested within the subject area of management. Third, Aston designed the degree programme from scratch; changing an established programme such as the CMDA would involve additional resources that could not be justified without a strong business case based on successful test results.

2.9.8 The influence of peer support

Newcomers developing their knowledge through collaborating with peers is a powerful aspect of learning in community of practice theory. "Apprentices learn mostly in relations with other

apprentices" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 93). Further, the authors refer to anecdotal evidence that given the right conditions, the circulation of knowledge among peers and near peers (those further ahead in their apprenticeship), spreads rapidly and effectively. These assertions were supported by the literature, as the importance of mentors and peers as a means of coping with every aspect of learning in practice was a strong emerging theme. There was evidence that these relationships most influenced the learners' level of engagement with academic practice. Learners used the relationships that built up with peers over the course of their learning programme to support each other, both in their academic work and with emotional needs. Taylor-Smith et al. (2019) and Wenger et al. (2015) describe how learners relied on each other as their first port of call. Some reached the point where they felt they could not continue, but the support of peers provided the support they needed to persist (Wenger et al., 2015). Taylor-Smith et al. (2019) reported that the peer group plays an important role. Learners commented that they valued belonging to the group calling it "a kind of larger family" (Taylor-Smith et al., 2019, p. 5). The study found that learners placed great value on what they described as a cohesive and supportive group and its effect on identity and learner agency, in terms of self-efficacy, emotion, belonging and wellbeing. However, a sense of belonging to a peer group can be elusive for some learners. Fabian et al. (2021) and Taylor-Smith et al. (2019) identify a 'cast adrift' group of learners that receive little support in the workplace from mentors or colleagues, which resulted in a lack of professional and organisational identity. Ultimately this can lead to low academic achievement or dropout. Similar to Schunk (1995), Dennen and Burner (2008) suggest using a more formalised system of peer support that incorporates mentoring. Peer mentoring involves learners identifying knowledge gaps and engaging with peers further advanced in their studies that can help them to build knowledge in these areas and achieve their learning goals. Beck (2004), found that mixing learners from different disciplines was successful, for example, students taking an English degree successfully mentored learners on an engineering programme, helping them improve their ability to write reports.

2.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This chapter investigated the extant literature related to degree apprenticeships and motivation. It provided an overview of current knowledge, highlighting the opportunities and challenges that they present for individuals, employers and universities. When considering learner performance on degree apprenticeships, there have been persistently high dropout rates since they were introduced, indicating that fundamental issues exist in the system that

transcend initial teething problems. Before the search for literature began, a suitable method was needed that could systematically examine current practice. Jean Lave and Étienne Wenger's theory of learning, articulated in Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation, or community of practice theory was considered to offer an appropriate lens through which to analyse and deconstruct the current system to identify its strengths and weaknesses (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The authors original intention was to redefine situated learning and rescue the idea of apprenticeship. The concept of legitimate peripheral participation comprised the central tenet of their theory, using examples of apprenticeship to illustrate how sociocultural practice develops mastery within the context of a community of practice. By critically exploring studies that have analysed the theory from different perspectives since its publication, it was found that community of practice theory would provide a successful theoretical foundation for this study, being a valid and appropriate lens through which to view current practice.

As the theory is based on socio-cultural situated learning, where learners learn together and from each other, developing self-efficacy and sense of belonging in a mutually supportive environment, it is easy to agree with the principles. However, in practice, the literature highlighted the difficulties experienced by learners that diminish motivation and affect persistence, evidenced by the number of leavers. Three broad areas were highlighted by the literature and guided the field work that informed the research objectives:

- **Pre-entry processes**. Who and what is involved and how is the output used to support learners.
- **Participation**. Issues of power and responsibility in creating and enabling access to the learning environment.
- **Identity**. How learners view themselves and how they are treated by their employer and the University.

2.10.1 Pre-entry processes

The pre-entry stage of conferring legitimacy is arguably the most important step, as it defines the learner in terms of their identity, meaning how they are seen and treated by others during their learning journey. Legitimacy is in the gift of the employer, but it is the University, through its pre-entry process that assesses legitimate participants and exploits its own resources to support each one in whatever way is needed to enable them to successfully complete the CMDA programme.

Bravenboer (2013) encourages universities to adopt holistic and detailed pre-entry processes. This includes understanding what the candidate brings to the learning programme, including work experience and educational background, by exploring their achievements and abilities. Whichever recruitment process is used, time should be spent time with candidates prior to enrolment, providing guidance to make sure that choices are well informed (Tinto, 2017) and inform the level of support needed to accelerate academic engagement where appropriate. The Kantar Public (2019) survey suggested that more information about degree apprenticeship programmes should be provided by universities to employers before recruitment begins, as this enables the employer and apprentices to understand the extent of their joint commitment prior to making a yes/no decision. The problem here is that in large organisations it is often difficult for universities to talk directly to the apprentice's line manager, instead relying on the HR and training team to act as the conduit to provide information and answer questions about the learning programme.

What is a candidate's motivation for joining the CMDA, as this can affect an individual's desire to learn? Motivation could be intrinsic/autonomous, where a learner chooses to learn and is doing so of their own volition, alternatively it could be extrinsic/controlled, where the individual might not be committed to learning and feels pressured, or obliged to be involved (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The latter situation might arise if company policy states that a degree is required for a particular level within an organisation, or a line manager insists that a member of their team enrols on the programme.

Lester (2020) promotes the use of strategic agreements between the employer and university to achieve a supportive learning environment that aligns all processes and lines of communication. He states that an agreement of this kind starts with recruitment. It should be based on a mutual understanding about who the programme is designed for and respects the power of the employer to select candidates. He also advises that an agreement should acknowledge the power that the university has as the owner of the learning programme to check each candidate's suitability and maintain control of award making and quality control functions. This includes highlighting any concerns to the employer that might affect an individual's ability to successfully complete a programme of study. It could be argued that universities currently operate this system, which is documented in the employer contract and learner agreement, but it should be part of a strategic partnership approach, not simply part of an administrational process.

2.10.2 Access to participation

The learner surveys revealed that the greatest challenge faced by apprentices was the interaction between maintaining their employee responsibilities and giving sufficient time to their studies (Kantar Public, 2019). The pedagogical, or andragogical and curriculum design should recognise the on and off the job training requirement, as the majority of learners recruited from the existing workforce are probably busy managers. This means that learners must be able to complete the degree apprenticeship alongside their employee responsibilities and within the learning time allowance (Department for Education, 2022). If the programme is unachievable within the time allowed, this could lead to learner overload, stress and dropout (IFF research, 2022). The learner survey findings indicated that there is a link between the amount of off-the-job training apprentices receive and satisfaction levels. Those learners with compliant levels of off-the-job training (i.e. 6 hours of their contracted hours each week) were more likely to be satisfied than those with non-compliant levels of off-the-job training (IFF research, 2022).

Learner support in the workplace was a strong theme in the literature. This includes peer relationships and workplace mentors that support identity development (Roberts et al., 2019; Wenger et al., 2015). These relationships are important as apprentices tended to spend long periods of time without contact with their provider (Kantar Public, 2019). Peers help each other by working together to solve problems, self-reflection and working out their weaknesses. Lave and Wenger (1991) state that apprentices learn mostly in relations with other apprentices and circulation of knowledge among peers and near peers, spreads rapidly and effectively. It was suggested in the literature that mentoring is not well understood and can be conflated with managing and coaching. Roberts et al. (2019) present a model of good practice that describes a mentor as being experienced in their mentees area of work and act as coordinator between the university and the apprentice(s). This model can be used to assess the nature of support provided to participants. Mulkeen et al. (2019) comment that mentoring is problematic for employers and that they would appreciate help to train mentors; a question for the employer participants.

2.10.3 The employer/learner identity conflict and speed of engagement with academic practice

The Chartered Management Institute (2020b) reports CMDA cohorts being significantly more diverse than typical business school intakes. The Engeli and Turner (2019) motivations

study agrees, reporting that the majority of respondents in their survey did not hold a higher-level qualification and furthermore would not have engaged in higher education if degree apprenticeships did not exist. These non-traditional learners come with work place experience, but might feel challenged and lack confidence coping with academic theory and practice. This presents universities with a challenge which they have not previously faced with their traditional student intake, which is how to support these non-traditional learners. (Fabian et al., 2021; Lester, 2020; Mulkeen et al., 2019; Saville et al., 2020).

Questions here relate to how the University manages the learner trajectory and identity formation, developing a sense of belonging and academic self-efficacy as early as possible in the learning programme to create aligned student workers, or sojourners (Fabian et al., 2021; Wenger et al., 2015). Tinto (2017) states that no support is more important to retention than early academic support, which enhances a learner's sense of self efficacy, reduces stress and increases the chances of subsequent success. He suggests that early warning systems should be established to identify those entering a programme academically unprepared.

The early stages of the learner journey appear to be crucial, evidenced by the high dropout rate in the first 6 months. This coupled with the CMDA learner profile raises questions about the ability of some to cope with academic practice, as this appeared to be the cause of most anxiety, due to it being unfamiliar territory and an uphill battle (Kantar Public, 2019; Wenger et al., 2015). If work is prioritised over study (Fabian et al., 2021), this can result in a failure to take the time to understand the importance of the practical and ideological knowledge needed by the professional practitioner. This could lead a learner to give up and return to their professional practice, where they feel a sense of belonging and feel proficient. This situation might be exacerbated and drop out accelerated if the employer/manager is not supportive or sympathetic to their learner identity, especially if the learning time allowance is not protected to enable the learner to engage at the deeper level and in a broader context to understand its intrinsic value. In the worst-case scenario the learning time allowance becomes subsumed by the day to day demands of the job and the apprenticeship becomes a part time course, with assignments completed in the evenings and weekends (Lester, 2020). This is not the intended purpose of work based socio-cultural learning and can lead to superficial engagement and stress (Kantar Public, 2019; Wenger et al., 2015).

2.10.4 The relationship of self-efficacy and identity to retention

Professional identity has been defined as the sum of the attitudes, values, knowledge, beliefs and skills that are shared by a community of practice (Yao et al., 2021). It can affect how people interact and differentiate themselves from other professional groups in the workplace (Crossley & Vivekananda-Schmidt, 2009; Johnson et al., 2012). Educational theorists suggest that self-efficacy is the foundation on which professional identity is formed and learner persistence is based (Bandura, 1989; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Tinto, 2017). Because of the importance of its relationship to developing identity, self-efficacy should be supported by universities and employers as it is learnt, not inherited and is task and challenge specific (Tinto, 2017). This means that a learner believing they can succeed in one task does not imply that they believe in the likelihood of success at a different task (Bandura, 1994). Tinto (2017) warns that even learners beginning a learning programme confident in their ability to succeed can encounter challenges that serve to weaken their sense of self-efficacy, especially in the first year of the learning programme, as they negotiate the boundary between their work and study communities. This is particularly relevant in the context of learners joining the CMDA programme, as many are current employees, likely to have been identified as potential future senior managers. They join the CMDA programme confident in their own ability with an established identity as a professional manager within their own community of practice and must become familiar with a new community of (academic) practice for the duration of the study programme. These individuals must learn to manage competing priorities; balancing work responsibilities with study responsibilities to develop self-efficacy, so it is not simply about the learning, it is also about overcoming obstacles that will enable them to engage and develop self-efficacy.

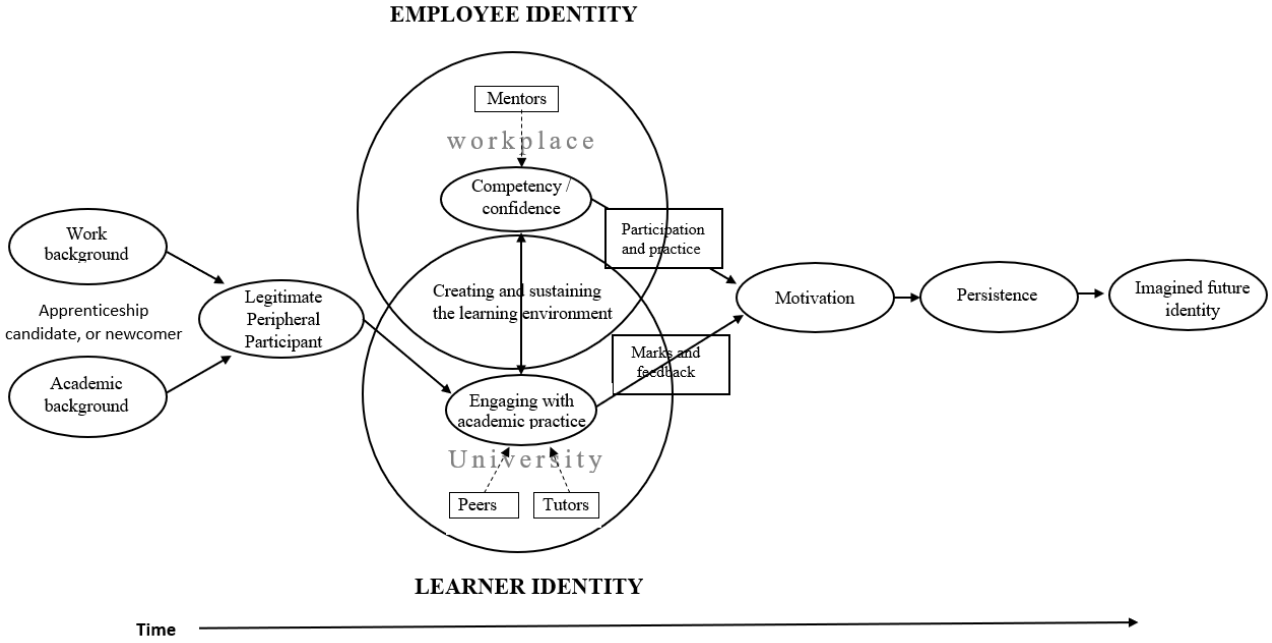
Wenger (1999) recognises this scenario. He states that when an individual is a full member of a community of practice they are in familiar territory. They are competent and recognised by their community as being competent, knowing how to engage with others, sharing the resources they use to communicate and go about their activities. He states that these are dimensions of competence that become dimensions of identity. But, there is an inverse position when a full member of a community of practice comes into contact with new practices in unfamiliar territory, such as an established employee joining the CMDA programme as a learner. This can disrupt and disorientate the individual, resulting in a lack of confidence, not quite knowing how to engage with others and with the resources of this new community. The challenge for employers and universities is how to support the transition of

the competent member of staff and full member of a community of practice in their work environment to becoming a newcomer within a temporary community of academic practice (Tinto, 2017; Wenger et al., 2015). Successful integration of work and study should be the aim of the employer and university, resulting in aligned student workers, rather than busy professionals. Learning should be recognised as a transformative process, of the learner becoming a certain person, involving who they are and what they can do, not just an accumulation of skills and information (Wenger et al., 2015).

2.11 A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF LEARNER PERSISTENCE IN A COMMUNITY OF MANAGEMENT AND ACADEMIC PRACTICE

As discussed earlier in this chapter, no model of learner persistence has been developed that can be used in an apprenticeship setting to identify specific variables influencing a decision to drop out or persist. It was felt that such a model would provide a practical contribution to knowledge in the field, therefore a conceptual model of learner persistence in a community of management and academic practice was constructed as the study progressed. Figure 15 presents version one of the model, created from the literature review findings and based on "a system of relationships between people, activities, and the world" that can affect motivation and persistence (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98). It starts with a newcomer being accepted into the community as a legitimate peripheral participant. The legitimate participant then enters the learning environment created jointly by the University and employer, which includes teaching, supported participation and practice, peers and mentors. Here, learners develop competency and confidence (knowledgeability), as they progress towards achieving full participation and their future imagined identity. The two circles forming the centrepiece represent the learning environment, presented earlier in figure 7, created jointly between the University and the employer; the oblong shapes indicating input/support. The only significance of the oval shapes in this diagram is to indicate a step in the process. The model is dynamic, which enabled it to evolve as the study progressed. This allowed for additional influences and further steps or processes to be added as they emerged from the interviews with participants over the course of the study. Conversely, existing influences could be removed (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 20).

Figure 15: A conceptual model of learner persistence in a community of management and academic practice (version one)



Source: author

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the methodological approach used to explore the themes emerging from the literature review. It discusses the research paradigm that was adopted for this enquiry, including the research design and how learner perceptions and experiences were collected. The starting point was the research question, which is restated below, as it helps researchers to focus their thoughts on the purpose of the study and the strategies that would be most effective for obtaining information (Silverman, 2011).

3.2 Research question

To critically explore whether the principles and characteristics defined by Jean Lave and Étienne Wenger in community of practice theory, could be used to improve the motivation and persistence of learners from large organisations enrolled on the chartered management degree apprenticeship programme at the University of Gloucestershire.

Objectives

1. To examine the current CMDA learning environment and practices to identify influences that enhance or diminish learner persistence, including the relationships, interactions and responsibilities of learners, employers and the University.
2. To compare the principal features that define community of practice theory with current practice to establish if the theory, or any of its parts, could improve learner persistence and consequently increase the rates of programme retention and achievement.
3. To assess the transferability and sustainability of any recommended changes to current practice.

3.3 Philosophical paradigm

Kuhn (1962) first used the term paradigm to explain a philosophical way of thinking. It is an expression to describe a researcher's world view (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006), which comprises a perspective and shared beliefs that influences how a researcher sees the world and how she or he interprets and acts within that world (Lather, 1986). To put it another way, it is a lens through which the researcher looks at the world, which shapes their research

(Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln et al., 2011). It also has a significant influence on each stage of the research process. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that a paradigm has four elements, namely ontology, epistemology, methodology and axiology and it is important to have a firm understanding of each, as they form the basic assumptions of a paradigm and inform the design of research projects.

Ontology is concerned with the nature of existence; 'what is' (Crotty, 1998), or the study of being (Blaikie, 2007). Epistemology describes how a researcher discovers the truth or reality; its nature and forms and how that reality can be acquired (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Keeves (1997) state that the term methodology articulates the systematic process used in a research project and refers to the research design, methods, approaches and procedures, which includes data gathering, the participants and the instruments used. Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) state that methodology involves the holistic research process linked to the paradigm or theoretical framework that is being used. Axiology concerns the philosophical approach to making decisions about values, including bias (Lincoln et al., 2011). A researcher has to consider their place in the research, as the approach could be emic therefore value bound or etic, value free. All researchers have biases; it is how they are acknowledged and dealt with that is important (O'Gorman & MacIntosh, 2014). Being axiologically responsible in a social project requires the researcher to demonstrate, through reflexive study, that the project embodies the highest axiological principles and he or she should be prepared to abandon the project if these principles are compromised (Hill, 1984).

When considering research approaches Pawson (1999) comments that positivism and phenomenology are not polar opposites as they might sometimes be portrayed. McNeill and Chapman (2005) elaborate on this by making a simple but broad distinction between the two paradigms stating that the more people that are studied, the less the researcher has to be personally involved with them and the researcher may claim reliability and representativeness. If the researcher thinks personal involvement is important then fewer people can be studied and the researcher can claim validity. McNeill and Chapman (2005, p. 27) state that "a sociologist's theoretical perspective will guide the choice of topic and the research method adopted." When planning a research project, Crotty (1998) suggests that two related questions should be considered. Firstly, what methodologies and methods will be employed and secondly, how these choices are justified. Crotty (1998, p. 2) goes on to say that there is more to it than just a process needed to answer a question, he says: "Justification … is something that reaches into the assumptions about reality that we bring to our work." A

number of factors must be considered for each method and should be based on the researcher's convictions, beliefs and interests (Goulding, 2002). It is also important to consider the aim of the research, epistemological issues and also other work that has been carried out (Buchanan & Bryman, 2007).

When deciding how to answer the research question, all these considerations were carefully evaluated along with the material that was gathered and presented in the literature review. As suggested by Buchanan and Bryman (2007), the work of leading authors in the field played a key role by drawing attention to the individualistic and complex nature of influences and human experiences that enhance or diminish learner motivation. The literature review provided evidence that a high proportion of learners struggle to engage with degree apprenticeships, eventually withdrawing rather than persisting and achieving their imagined future identity. A decision to withdraw can be the result of a multiplicity of reasons and is a significant action that might affect an individual's self-belief and employment prospects. For these reasons the philosophical approach chosen for this enquiry was interpretivism, as the knowledge acquired is socially constructed rather than objectively determined (Carson et al., 2001) and perceived (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). The epistemological and ontological position of interpretivism is that reality is complex, multiple and relative, and meaning must be constructed because objects in the world are indeterminate (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). The interpretivist looks for patterns of behaviour and generates theory from the research process using an inductive approach (Bryman, 2011), rather than attempting to find a generalised base of understanding that would apply to the whole population (Creswell, 2007; Neuman, 2003).

To examine the persistence problem, it is important to understand a learner's subjective experience, which are time and context bound (Neuman, 2014). McNeill and Chapman (2005, p. 19) state that the interpretivist researcher must "get inside other people's heads" and close relationships must be formed with participants to fully understand people's actions which, are an interpretation of their own individual situation. Socially constructed results can then be created rather than being objectively determined and perceived (Carson et al., 2001). To achieve this the researcher must consider the complexity of intersubjectivity and the interrelationships of the community involved (Crotty, 1998). Rigid frameworks should be avoided and a personal and flexible research structure should be adopted (Carson et al., 2001), which is receptive to capturing meaning in human interaction (Black, 2006) and attempt to make sense of what is perceived as reality (Carson et al., 2001). By taking this

approach a deeper understanding of the factors and influences affecting motivation and persistence for different learners at different times during their learner journey was achieved.

3.4 Research design

Denzin and Lincoln (2018, p. 10) describe qualitative research as a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. They state that qualitative research "consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible, turning the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self." Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world, meaning that research takes place in its natural setting. Creswell (2003) describes how methods differ depending on the research question and what is needed. For example, case studies and grounded theory research explore processes, activities and events. He states that ethnographic research analyses broad cultural-sharing behaviours of individuals or groups and case studies as well as phenomenology can be used to study individuals.

Two different research design approaches were considered, being action research and case study, as both are compatible with this study's philosophical paradigm. Interestingly, the theory and practice of action research resembles the concept of a community of practice, where continual improvement is inherent (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It is also closely aligned with the theory of reflective practice (Checkland & Holwell, 1998; Leitch & Day, 2000), in which an enquiry proceeds in a cyclical way examining and re-examining an experience. Kurt Lewin is often cited in action research literature as being influential in developing this methodology (Checkland & Holwell, 1998; Lewin, 1947). There have been many interpretations of his experiential learning theories that inform action research design, depicting the iterative nature of an enquiry. Of the two approaches this is the only one that attempts to create a working community of practice. Should that be achieved, the methodology of action research through its practice-based epistemology (McNiff, 2016), would provide valuable data for the wider application of communities of practice theory in apprenticeship settings. However, this approach was ruled out for several practical reasons. First, it could not commence until senior managers of the participating organisation(s) were convinced about the investment in such a study. The justification to create an action research group would need to deal with the involvement of the staff involved and whether it distracted them from day to day operations, which could have time, cost and political implications. Second, if established, the group could face initial inertia as members attempt to balance the

ongoing day to day distractions that managers would undoubtedly face as they participated in the project. Third, the duration of the study would need to be sufficient to test the concept and establish whether there was any material change in retention rates, which in this case would be two to three years; this being the duration of a CMDA programme. A lot could happen in this time including changes in senior management and/or priorities, which could impact on the study.

An exploratory case study approach was considered most suitable. This methodology, which is widely used in business research (Bryman & Bell, 2007), involves the close examination of people, topics or programmes in a single setting, seeking to answer focused research questions (DeMarrais & Lapan, 2017). A case study answers 'how' and 'why' questions (Yin, 2003) and it is conducted within its contextual conditions, because the setting is relevant to the study. Ideally a case is explored through more than one lens, within defined boundaries, gathering material from multiple sources, which means that triangulation can be achieved, making the findings more credible and dependable (Baxter & Jack, 2008; DeMarrais & Lapan, 2017). The researcher's purpose is not to study everything but focus on specific issues (DeMarrais & Lapan, 2017). To this end, Yin (2003) states the importance of defining the case and the unit of analysis as the first step in bounding the study. This case study was set within defined boundaries being the CMDA programme and the University of Gloucestershire. The study also incorporates a temporal dimension by including interviews with learners at different stages of their apprenticeship programme and triangulation through interviews with employers of the apprentices and the University.

Stake (1995) advises researchers to be entirely focussed on the case they define, as one of the most serious problems is being drawn away from the topic by things that are irrelevant to the study, but might be important to someone else, an interviewee for example. However, the researcher must also be flexible and open enough to recognise answers to research questions that are not expected (DeMarrais & Lapan, 2017). Propositions (Yin, 2003), or issues (Stake, 1995), which derive from the literature, professional experience, or theories are helpful in case studies, as they can place limits on the scope of the study and increase the feasibility of completing the project (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Community of practice theory and the findings from the literature review provide these propositions. Both Yin and Stake state that propositions, or issues, are necessary in case studies as they lead to a conceptual framework that anchors and guides the research (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 20) note that a conceptual model as a map is helpful as they identify either graphically or in

narrative form the constructs to be studied and the presumed interrelationship between them. These constructs or "intellectual bins." provide a method of storing material gathered and serve as an anchor for the study that can be referred to during the analysis stage. They suggest that the model should continue to develop as the study progresses and the relationships between constructs will emerge as the material gathered from the field work is analysed. A conceptual model of learner persistence in a community of management and academic practice, developed from community of practice theory and the literature review presented in figure 14 provided the anchor and guided this research project.

When the data or material has been collected Yin (2003) and Stake (1995) suggest various techniques for the analysis stage, including pattern matching, explanation building and categorical aggregation, however Baxter and Jack (2008) advise researchers to review various types of analysis and find the approach they are most comfortable with. DeMarrais and Lapan (2017) suggests that a system for sorting and categorising the material is important at this stage, as the researcher reviews and codes all the material, seeking themes that answer the research question. They state that this can only be achieved as the researcher goes back and forth through the data or material that has been collected. Thematic analysis was chosen as the most appropriate method for the analysis stage, as its inductive, iterative approach complements case study methodology and the interpretivist nature of the enquiry (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is ideal for the examination of meaning in both individual and group behaviour, which are important aspects of socio-cultural learning (Evans & Lewis, 2018; Lave & Wenger, 1991). This method is not associated to any pre-existing theoretical framework, therefore not theoretically bounded (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Evans & Lewis, 2018). Because of its theoretical freedom, it is a flexible research tool that can offer a rich and detailed, yet complex account of the data, identifying and reporting themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Evans & Lewis, 2018). Thematic analysis is an iterative process; it begins at the start of the data collection process and continues as the researcher transcribes the interviews (Evans & Lewis, 2018). In the absence of this widely used method being defined, Braun and Clarke (2006) developed clear guidelines for those wanting to use thematic analysis in a deliberate and rigorous way. Braun and Clarke (2006) advise researchers that a pitfall can be unconvincing analysis, where themes overlap or do not appear to work. This can happen when inadequate examples are used from the material collected, therefore it is crucial that it is properly and thoroughly analysed and is not simply a selection of extracts

with no analytic connecting. They state that “being explicit, thoughtful and deliberate in the application of method and theory is important” Braun and Clarke (2019, p. 595).

3.5 Planning the field work

Semi structured interviews were considered the most effective method of collecting the perceptions and experiences of participants. This approach “allows leeway for following up on whatever angles are deemed important by the interviewee” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 579). It also complements case study methodology, in particular the analysis stage that requires data reduction through coding to reveal patterns (Baxter & Jack, 2008; DeMarrais & Lapan, 2017). The semi structured interview is the most often used method in qualitative studies due to its versatility and ability to facilitate reciprocity between the participant and interviewer, leading to an improvised approach to questioning (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Galletta, 2013). To achieve this, a good level of understanding about the research area is essential, because the predetermined questions and questioning during the interview are based on a knowledge of the area being researched (Kelly et al., 2010; Wengraf, 2001). This encourages the interviewee to use the language they are most comfortable with, especially in this case the language of the workplace, and express themselves in the way they perceive the social world (Qu & Dumay, 2011). It also encourages participants to give the most expansive answers. (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Saunders et al., 2019). The researcher in this study has over 25 years’ experience in the field of apprenticeships, which was an advantage in the method used to collect the perceptions and experiences of participants. In practice this meant that the predetermined questions and questioning during the interview were based on a good knowledge of the area being researched.

Braun and Clarke (2006) state that the interviewer must keep in mind that a rigorous data collection procedure is the most important factor that determines objectivity and trustworthiness, especially when using thematic analysis to analyse responses from participants. Yin (2003) states that the hallmark of a case study is using multiple data sources within defined boundaries to answer the research question. Baxter and Jack (2008, p. 554) agree, commenting that to achieve this, it is important that each party in the triadic relationship that exists in a work-based learning programme is heard. In this case study this means the University, the employer and the learner, but keeping in mind that the learner was the predominant consideration and loudest voice.

3.5.1 Selecting a sampling approach

Morse (1991) suggests that four approaches to sampling can be used in qualitative research: purposeful sampling, the volunteer sample, the nominated sample and the sample that consists of the entire population. As the aim for stage one learner interviews was to achieve a sample that represents maximum variation, purposeful sampling was chosen as the most appropriate method, as this is its guiding principle (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). This requires the researcher to purposely select participants that are knowledgeable or experienced within the field of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) and represent a variety of perspectives to provide insight and understanding of the phenomena (Higginbottom, 2004; Marshall, 1996).

Marshall (1996) suggests that when using the purposeful method, it is helpful to develop a sample frame that includes characteristics that might influence an individual's contribution. It should be based on the researcher's practical knowledge of the research area, the available literature and from the study itself (Marshall, 1996). Characteristics drawn from the literature that were considered to be the most important variables in this study and instrumental when selecting the sample, were a learner's educational experience, age and time on the CMDA programme. These characteristics contribute to identifying traditional and non-traditional learners. The data received from the University's MIS system revealed another characteristic, being the predominance of public sector employees. As the scope of this study was small, by using the data taken from the apprenticeship learner records system, it was possible to create a sample frame comprising the total population, subdivided into the key characteristics to be used when selecting the sample for the interview stage. Table 7 provides a summary of the learner population, followed by a description of each characteristic in the sample frame. Appendix C provides a more detailed analysis of the data.

Table 7: Sample frame including total population and key characteristics

						Proportion of non-traditional learners		
	N	**Public sector**	**Private sector**	**% split between public and private**		**Public sector**	**Private sector**	**Ave age**
Learners: 6 months	17	13	4	76%	24%	69%	100%	34
Learners: 18 months	15	12	3	80%	20%	92%	100%	30
Total in learning	**32**	**25**	**7**	78%	22%	80%	100%	
Completers	7	5	2	71%	29%	100%	100%	41
Leavers	19	10	9	53%	47%	70%	78%	30
Total	**58**	**40**	**18**	**69%**	**31%**	**82%**	**89%**	**34**
Dropout %		25%	50%					
Note: Public sector defined as fully or predominatly funded from government budgets								

Source: University of Gloucestershire MIS system (July 2023)

Non-traditional learners: The CMI has commented on the increasing number of non-traditional learners joining the CMDA programme (Chartered Management Institute, 2020a). This group has particular difficulties, in particular academic practice, which can be an obstacle to persistence and places them at risk of non-completion (Kantar Public, 2019; Wenger et al., 2015; Whiteford et al., 2013). The age profile indicated that all CMDA learners were over 25 years of age with 55% aged 30+. This older age group also had the highest rate of withdrawal at 45%, which corresponds with the national data produced by Department for Education (2023b). The majority of learners held qualifications below full level 3 (41%) with some having no formal qualifications. This group had the highest dropout rate at 50%. Given the definition provided by Burnell (2015) and Gilardi and Guglielmetti (2011), all CMDA learners at the University of Gloucestershire could be categorised as non-traditional, however, many had gained a first degree early in their career, well before joining the CMDA programme. Defining which learners were traditional or non-traditional was considered to be an important characteristic necessary for selecting the sample to be interviewed and a key feature when presenting the findings. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, prior academic achievement was used to categorised learners, with those not holding a degree at level 6 being non-traditional and those with a degree at level 6 being traditional learners. Applying this definition, the percentage of non-traditional learners from each sector was 82% public sector and 89% private sector.

Time: The temporal dimension is central to situated learning, as knowledge, competency and identity are formed and developed over time (Wenger, 1998b). The power of a community of practice comes through participation with others, as learners develop their knowledge through collaborating with peers and by working alongside more experienced practitioners, incrementally adopting the practices of the community, both in their academic work and with emotional needs (Taylor-Smith et al., 2019). This social and modulated perspective treats learning as a process of constructing practice, meaning and identity (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998a). Fabian et al. (2021) found that the well-established professional identities of learners evolved as they began to succeed in their studies due to enhanced confidence and the grounding in theory. For some learners, the journey ends before completion, with a high proportion withdrawing in the early months of the programme. The IFF study found that nationally 38% of learners withdrew in the first five months, a situation repeated at the University of Gloucestershire where between 2018 and 2021, 48% of learners dropped out

within the first six months (appendix C). This makes the early weeks of the CMDA programme high risk for learners, employers and the University.

Sector: The population was weighted towards public sector employees (69%). Whilst the number of leavers from the public and private sectors was similar, a higher proportion of learners from the private sector withdrew from the programme (50%) than their counterparts from public sector organisations (25%). This could indicate challenges for individuals within the private sector engaging with apprenticeship learning.

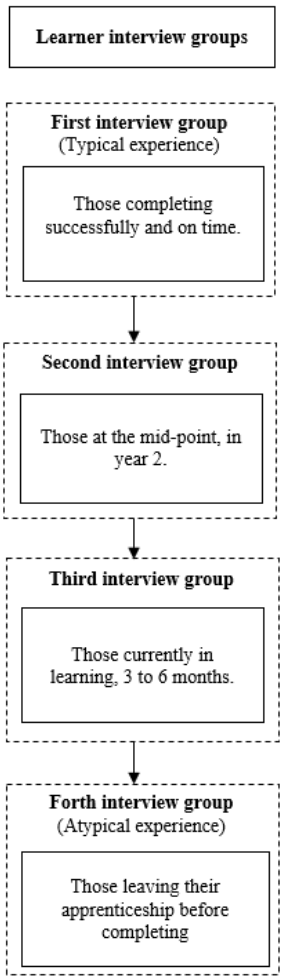
3.5.2 Recruiting the learner participants

For purposeful sampling, Morse (1991) states that the researcher initially chooses to interview participants who have undergone the experience and are considered typical. Based on the information from these interviews the research then expands to include participants with different experiences. Finally, participants with atypical experiences are sought so the breadth of the phenomena may be understood. Given the importance of time in the development of knowledge and competence, the population was subdivided into time categories, being: group 1) those that had successfully finished their apprenticeship in the time allowed. As the majority of learners do complete on time this was categorised as a typical experience (Morse, 1991); group 2) learners at the midpoint of their programme; group 3) learners that had begun the apprenticeship within 6 months, which seemed to be a significant time in the learning programme, as many drop out within the first three to six months (IFF research, 2022), and group 4) learners that had left the apprenticeship before completing, as this provided the atypical experience (Morse, 1991). By grouping learners in this way, the intention was to create a time lapse, in other words to be able to move forwards and backwards in time based on the comments and experiences of learners at different stages of the three-year programme. For example, to understand if and how academic and work-based practice develops and what enhances or diminishes progress and persistence.

The aim was to interview five to eight participants in each time category, so twenty to thirty-two learners in total with traditional and non-traditional learners and the public/private sectors represented. The process was to become complete at the point of "theoretical saturation" (Hall & Hall, 2004, p. 132), in other words when nothing new is discovered by increasing the numbers of interviews. If this number was not sufficient, more current/past learners would be approached. The advice from Carson et al. (2001) was followed. They state that additional categories might be added and the order of progression might change based on

information received as the interviews progress, so advise researchers to remain flexible, rather than sticking to a rigid framework. This advice proved to be useful as it was difficult to engage learners that had withdrawn from the CMDA programme, so an alternative questionnaire method was used that will be described later. Figure 16 shows the planned structure for the stage one interviews.

Figure 16: Learner interview structure applying purposeful sampling



Source: Author; Morse (1991)

3.5.3 Invitation to participate

Invitations to participate in the research were sent by email. There was a high acceptance rate in all categories except for leavers, as mentioned earlier. **Table 8** provides details of acceptance rates and a summary of the characteristics of the final participants. The target participant numbers were achieved in each learner interview group with a good mix of traditional and non-traditional learners. However, there were only two acceptances from the

learner leaver group and no public sector representation. This response was disappointing and meant that an alternative method was needed to collect the experiences of this group.

Table 8: Summary of learner acceptances and participants by sector

	Individual participants	% invitations accepted	% of category	Public sector	Private sector	% split between public and private		*NTLs
Learners: 6 months	6	60%	35%	5	1	83%	17%	33%
Learners: 18 months	6	55%	40%	6	0	100%	-	84%
Learners: completers	5	71%	71%	5	0	100%	-	100%
Leavers: interviewed	2	53%	53%	0	2	50%	50%	100%
Leavers: questionnaire	8			5	3			75%
	27	**57%**	**47%**	**21**	**6**	**78%**	**22%**	**81%**
*Non traditional learners								

Source: author

3.5.4 The employer and university participants

The second and third stages involving employers and the University were important to contextualise learner views and provide insight into the nature of the relationship between the University and each employer participant. It also enabled a degree of triangulation to be carried out, to add validity to the analysis (Denzin, 1978).

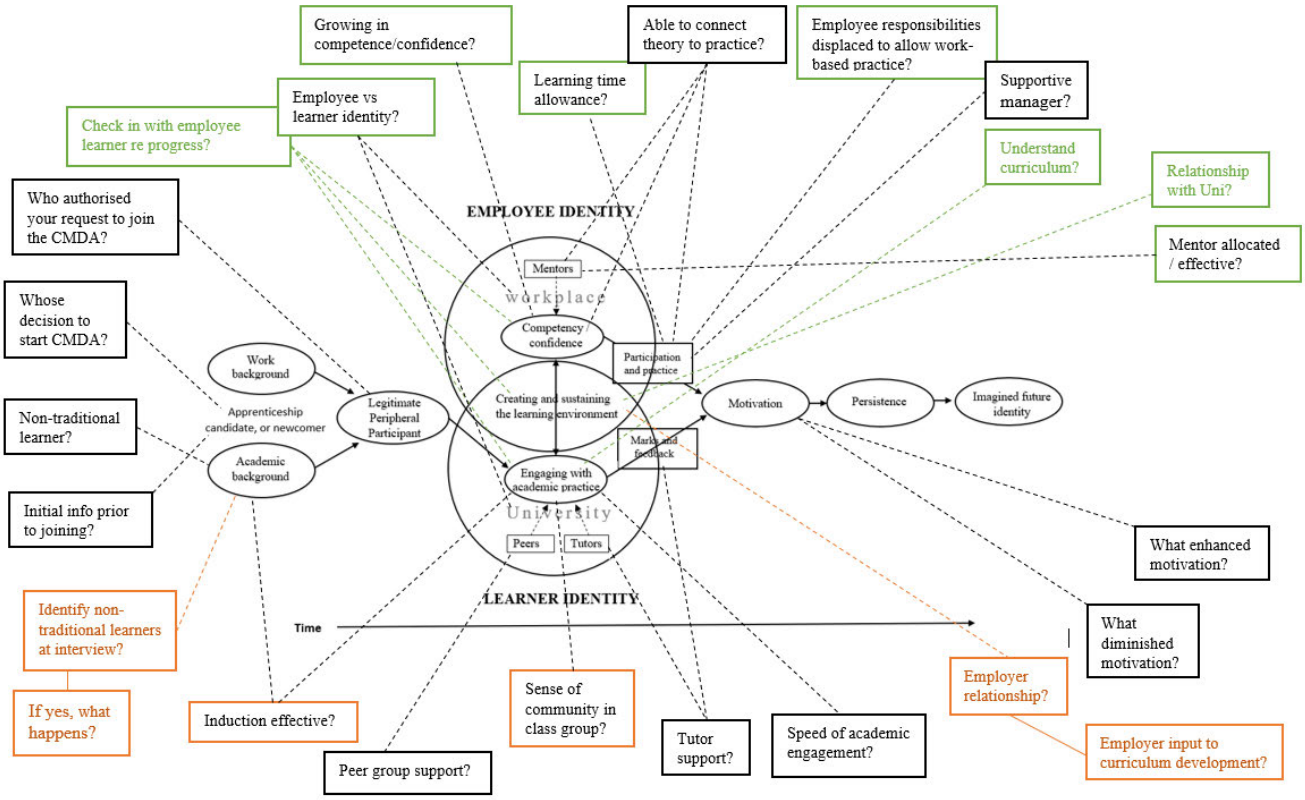
The entire population approach to sampling (Morse, 1991) was the only option for the university interviews as there was only one, being the University of Gloucestershire, with members of the CMDA course team and business engagement team being interviewed. The nominated sample method was used for the employers, as they were selected, or nominated for the study as the employers of the learners that had been interviewed. In each case, the senior executives responsible for organisational development were interviewed, not the direct line manager of the apprentices. This was to avoid any possibility of compromising the anonymity of the employee participants involved in the study. An associated benefit of interviewing senior executives was their ability to provide information about their organisation's strategic perspective on training and development. All those invited to take part in the second and third stages accepted.

3.5.5 Interview considerations and design

Rubin and Rubin (2011) suggest that semi-structured interviews begin by creating an interview guide, which covers the main topics of the study, but should not be strictly adhered to (Bryman, 2011). Its purpose is to provide a means to explore the area being researched with each participant, as this provides guidance on what to talk about and how to collect their experiences (Gill et al., 2008; Holloway & Wheeler, 2010). Kallio et al. (2016) suggest five interrelated phases for the interview guide, to ensure validity and trustworthiness: 1) evaluate the appropriateness of using semi-structured interviews in relation to the research question; 2) undertake a thorough appraisal of current knowledge; 3) develop a preliminary list or guide of 'loose' questions on two levels: main themes and follow-up questions; 4) test the relevance and coverage of the questions and reformulate if necessary, and 5) produce a final guide for data collection that is logical and clear.

Following the advice of Kitto et al. (2008), a preliminary list of loose questions for learners, employers and the University were developed from the literature review to provide factual and attitudinal data (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; McNeill & Chapman, 2005; Saunders et al., 2019). The questions are mapped on the conceptual model detailed in figure 17. Questions for learners are in black, questions for employers in green and questions for the university are in orange; questions that are for both learners and their employer or the University are shown with black text and the appropriate coloured box.

Figure 17: A preliminary list of 'loose' questions for testing, based on the conceptual model of learner engagement (Kitto et al., 2008)



Source: Author

The questions were arranged in five topic sections, shown in table 9. The sections were kept similar for each group to enable triangulation, but the questions reflected the appropriate perspective. For example, from the learner perspective, the question about off the job learning time allowance was: How do you manage the learning time allowance? From the employer perspective: How do you ensure that your line managers are aware of the learning time allowance and they are providing this time to their apprentice(s)?

Table 9: Interview topic sections

	Learners*	Employers	University
1	About the learner	About the employer	The class community
2	The class community	The relationship with the university	The relationship with the employer
3	Curriculum engagement	Curriculum understanding and engagement	Curriculum design and development
4	Work based participation and practice	Work based participation and practice	Work based participation and practice
5	Motivation	Motivation	Motivation

*The Learner Leaver group had an additional section which asked about the respondent's reasons for withdrawing.

A focus group was used to test the relevance and coverage of the questions for the learner groups and the order in which the questions were to be asked (Kallio et al., 2016). The meeting was kindly organised by the CMDA course leader and lasted 30 minutes. The eight second year CMDA learners that took part were from a mixed work background, some being NHS employees and some from the private sector, but they were of a similar age. As the group knew each other they were happy to voice their opinion and the discussion was fast paced. The outcome of the focus group was that the questions from figure 16 were found to reliably cover all five areas of the enquiry and generate a good level of participation. Some of the questions were reordered within their topic section, the aim being to improve the flow of the interview, but it was found that during the interviews the order was often dictated by the interviewee. The focus group also provided some very useful material that has been used in the analysis stage.

3.5.6 Axiological and methodological considerations

The inductive case study methodology in this research, used a variety of sources that enabled multiple perspectives to be revealed and understood. This raised the important consideration of how to manage a number of complex interrelationships (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Crotty,

1998), including the power dynamics between senior managers, employees, learners and academic staff. DeMarrais and Lapan (2017) comment that case studies can be regarded by participants as a form of evaluation, therefore the researcher must bear in mind the natural tension that a participant might experience if they feel under scrutiny. For this reason, learner participants were regarded as the most vulnerable group in the interrelationship.

As building trust was of the utmost importance, three principles were followed throughout the planning and field work stages when dealing with participants, namely informed consent, the right to privacy and protection from harm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012). This started at the planning stage with the initial communication and continued throughout the interviews. For example, the email inviting learners to participate provided details about the aim of the study and a participant information sheet was attached giving further information about the research, providing reassurance about confidentiality (appendix D). At the start of each interview, the participants anonymity and ability to opt out of any questions or the interview at any time was made clear (Creswell, 2003).

The researchers longstanding relationship with each of the employer and university participants meant that bias was an important consideration, in particular recognising and setting aside preconceptions, which mostly involved not making assumptions based on familiarity and past experience. The use of triangulation provided a means to mitigate bias and achieve better results through using multimethod approaches (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012).

To summarise, five aspects guided the process of preparing for the interview stage:

1. *Axiological*. The interpretivist researcher must consider how to control bias during an interview due to the emic, value bound nature of the research process (Finnis, 2011). The interviewer entered the study with prior knowledge, therefore must recognise and manage their own preconceptions and influences, or the value of the study will be compromised (McNeill & Chapman, 2005).
2. *Participant wellbeing, awareness and consent*. Participants should be fully aware of the scope and potential implications of the study and give their consent before the meeting (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). Also, before the interview takes place, the method of recording the interview should be agreed (Bryman, 2011). An associated consideration for the researcher in this study was recognising and being prepared to manage the complex interrelationships, including power dynamics between senior managers, learners and academic staff (Crotty, 1998).

3. *Place*. Finding the right space and environment for the interviews should be considered. Bryman (2011) believes that in business research studies, finding a place that is quiet and where the interview will not be interrupted can be one of the most difficult tasks. Since the pandemic, video meetings have become more frequent and often the preferred method of contact, so 'the right space' involves ensuring that the participant and the interviewer are not conducting the meeting in public/shared offices.
4. *Confidentiality*. The identities of participants should be protected, even if the subject matter does not appear to be sensitive (Silverman, 2011).
5. *Recording and reflecting on progress*. It is important to keep a research diary or log with records of what has been done, decisions taken and anything worthy of note during the course of the research. This includes non-verbal communication such as facial expressions during interviews, as this helps to assist the memory when writing and analysing the results (Bryman, 2011; Silverman, 2011).

There were no issues raised at any point in any of the interviews, or afterwards. Participants were open and very honest, several offered further help should it be needed. This offer was taken up to review and test a leaver questionnaire, that will be discussed later.

3.5.7 Learner interviews

The learner interviews took place over seven months, in the order described earlier. The code used in the Findings chapter to anonymise comments and represent where learners are in their learning programme is shown in brackets, as follows. Learner completers (Comp) were invited first, those at the midpoint of the programme (MP) second, learners that were in the early stages of the degree apprenticeship (New) third, and finally learners that had withdrawn at any time (Leaver). A one-week gap was left between emailing each group to help with scheduling. This worked. Most of those agreeing to be interviewed came back within a day or two, which meant scheduling the groups in the preferred order was achieved, with two exceptions, one from the Comp group and the other from the New group. Both were interviewed later than the others in their respective group. It should be mentioned that the completers had achieved their learning aim (BSc Hons Leadership and Management), but had not been End Point Assessed (EPA). Given the national achievement rate and the degree of preparedness shown by the learner completers interviewed, there was little doubt that they would complete the full apprenticeship.

Overall, 28 learners across the Completers (Comp), Mid-point (MP) and New categories were contacted by email and 17 agreed to be interviewed, which is a 61% acceptance rate. The most difficult group to engage was the Leaver group, which was anticipated. From the outset it was decided to treat this group with sensitivity by regarding it as possible that their experience may have had an adverse effect on their personal and/or professional lives. Alternatively, they might simply feel they have nothing to contribute and see no point in taking part. Given this possibility, a test was conducted by sending the same email used for the other groups to 10 leavers asking for their participation in the research. Only one responded. One further leaver from the initial 10 agreed to take part, but this was achieved because of a good relationship between the interviewer and the business involved. As there was a relatively small withdrawn learner population of 19 and given the importance of this group's experiences to the research project, it was felt that a different method of engagement was needed. This was because the risk of sending emails to the remaining 9 Leavers asking for an interview and getting a <10% response rate, would not be a sufficiently sized sample (Bryman & Bell, 2007). It was felt that giving the Leaver group the option to complete a questionnaire as an alternative to an interview might encourage a better response. Details of the questionnaire approach and the outcome will be discussed later.

Of the 19 interviews, 15 were carried out on Teams, or face to screen, while 4 interviews were face to face. Since COVID lockdown, Teams interviews have become a preferred medium to use for business meetings, teaching and job interviews. Lockdown moved 'video conferencing' to a new level compared to what it was a decade ago, driven by advances in technology and convenience (Santhosh et al., 2021). There was no noticeable difference between the openness and level of detailed discussion between face to face or face to screen interviews.

There were some interesting differences in responses between the learner groups. It was useful to separate the participants into learning time zones as there was a noticeable shift in the confidence of CMDA learners as they progressed, in particular the way that the non-traditional learners grew into the programme. For example, this was evident in the way the Comp and MP groups talked about the relevance of the course content to their work, which became clearer to them over time. This was in contrast to some in the New group who were 5 months in to the course and finding it difficult to connect theory to practice. In these cases, they described a feeling of being out of their depth, which the Comp and MP groups

recognised as an early problem for them, but commented that this changed at some point into the second year.

3.5.8 Leaver questionnaire

As mentioned, the response from the leaver group to the invitation to participate in this study was low, so a different approach was needed to engage enough of this group to provide a reasonable range of perceptions and experiences. This was done by offering two options; an interview, or alternatively completing an online questionnaire (appendix E). McGuirk and O'Neill (2016) state that questionnaire surveys can be useful and combine effectively with other forms of qualitative research, such as interviews and focus groups, although there are limitations to the data that can be gathered, which must be considered.

An email was sent to 21 individuals in the leaver group inviting them to participate as an interviewee, or by completing a short on-line questionnaire, using Survey Monkey as the tool to collect and store the data. The target group included the leavers that had already been contacted, but not the two that had agreed to be interviewed. A link to the survey was included in the email (appendix F). The questions used in the questionnaire were drawn from responses from earlier interviews with the Comp, MP and New groups, which meant that material already gathered made it possible to formulate meaningful questions (Rowley, 2014). The design of the questionnaire was guided by Bryman and Bell (2007) and McGuirk and O'Neill (2016). It was noted that open questions have a greater potential to provide in depth responses, but a high response rate was needed, so the time to complete the questionnaire was a major consideration. McGuirk and O'Neill (2016) suggest that 20 to 30 minutes is the maximum time that participants are willing to spend completing a questionnaire. Given the sensitivities associated with this group, 20 to 30 minutes was felt to be too long, so ten minutes was the target completion time (and referred to in the covering email), plus any time respondents wanted to spend providing additional comments. To achieve this completion time, the questionnaire had to be relatively brief and not complex (Lumsden, 2005). Closed and matrix questions were used, but respondents were asked to provide additional comments to mitigate the possibility of interesting replies not being covered by fixed answers (McGuirk & O'Neill, 2016).

Collis and Hussey (2009) suggest that the questionnaire is piloted or tested as fully as possible before distribution. This was done using three of the learners that participated in the interviews, who offered further help if needed during the research. Their feedback informed

the final design and helped to hit the ten-minute completion target by eliminating questions that were less relevant. The survey was distributed using Survey Monkey and initially sent in blocks of five to check the response rate, the intention being to adjust the covering email if there was a low/no response rate. Fourteen questions were included in the questionnaire, arranged in five groups:

1. About the respondent
2. Primary motivating factors for joining the CMDA
3. Reasons for withdrawal
4. Workplace support
5. University support

Eight responses were received, which was a 38% response rate and meant that with the two individuals that were interviewed, ten learner leavers participated in the study.

3.5.9 Employer interviews

Five organisations were represented at the employer stage; two from the private sector, two from the public sector and one from education. Each employer approached for an interview accepted the invitation. All participants were senior executives within their organisation, with decision making responsibility for organisational development and all had employees on the CMDA programme that had been interviewed for the research project. These employer interviews provided a good understanding of the relationship between their organisation and the University, it also allowed a degree of triangulation to take place, providing a thick description of the learners working environment and the support that is provided (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012). Each employer participant was happy to discuss their approach to apprenticeship learning, including areas for development, their relationship with the University and their strategic intentions when it came to employing apprentices as part of their CPD, training, recruitment and retention planning. All the employers interviewed had established apprenticeship programmes with significant numbers of staff on lower level apprenticeships over many years, as well as more recently taking on degree apprentices, including the CMDA. The interviews were scheduled to take 30 to 40 minutes maximum, in fact they all lasted well in excess of one hour, which demonstrates the employer participants engagement with the topic and their level of interest in improving the degree apprenticeship experience within their organisation.

3.5.10 University interviews

Interviews took place with five members of university staff, three in the apprenticeship team responsible for recruitment and administration, including the director, one member of the curriculum team and one personal tutor. Questions for this group were drawn from the learner and employer interviews, with answers providing the third piece of the triangulation.

3.6 Transcribing the interviews

Bryman (2011) suggests that each hour of recording takes five to six hours to transcribe, although some estimate longer transcription times (Hall & Hall, 2004). Bryman (2011) recommends that researchers should not wait until all the material is collected but should begin transcribing and coding from the outset. Transcribing the interviews, that lasted between 30 to 40 minutes, on average took two hours to complete, so less time than expected. As Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested, this was a good way to become familiar with the material. However, when the transcripts were read and re-read as a complete body of experiences and perceptions, it was surprising how the interviews connected to form a complete picture with each other and themes emerged (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding was not started until all the interviews had been completed, rather than from the outset as suggested by Bryman and Bell (2007). To have started before completion would have compromised the epistemological approach that was being taken, described in the next section. Transcribing immediately after the interview had another benefit, being to incrementally improve interview technique. For example, being more concise asking the questions and using silence to signal that the interviewee has the opportunity to reflect on the question before giving an answer. This can amplify an answer and encourage more of the learner voice and less of the interviewer voice (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

It is suggested that to give confidence to readers of the transcript, i.e. that it is accurate and authentic, the interview should be transcribed to reproduce exactly what the interviewee said, including ‘verbal tics’ (Bryman & Bell, 2007). They go on to advise against guessing at what is said if the recording is not clear, but instead the convention (???) should be used (Bryman & Bell, 2007). This was not necessary, although as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), the transcripts were checked against the original recordings for accuracy, which highlighted some missing words, but mainly missing expressions, such as a laugh, a groan, or a tone of voice indicating an emotion, such as frustration.

3.7 Analysis

Within a social constructionist epistemology there are many types of analysis that can be used that are diverse and complex (Holloway & Todres, 2003). Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that Thematic Analysis should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis, as such it is a method that researchers should learn first. Using Thematic Analysis, researchers are not theoretically bound, as is the case in other forms of analysis such as grounded theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, it is important that researchers are clear about their theoretical position. This means that researchers must adhere to their epistemological commitments, which in this enquiry means taking an inductive 'bottom up' approach. This involves linking themes to the data as the researcher "notices patterns of meaning and issues of interest as they move back and forward across the entire data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). This contrasts with an inductive, theoretical thematic analysis, where a 'top down' approach is taken and the researcher seeks themes to code (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The six phase approach produced by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used in the data analysis stage and summarised in table 10. It was noted that this is a guide and not a linear process, but recursive and develops over time.

Table 10: Braun and Clarke (2006) six phase guidelines for thematic analysis, including a summary of the application to this enquiry

Phase 1	Create transcripts and become familiar with the data.	Transcribed the interviews and focus groups verbatim including non-verbal utterances. Transcripts were checked against the recorded interview for accuracy. Notes made about interesting features.
Phase 2	Create initial codes.	Transcripts uploaded to NVIVO. Further familiarisation of the data took place and codes created, without concern for the number of codes created, or any overlap, or contradictions.
Phase 3	Sort codes into themes.	Reviewed codes to look for patterns and combined codes to create overarching themes. Started to develop a thematic map to create a visual representation of the codes feeding into the themes. Created candidate themes.
Phase 4	Review themes.	Reviewed and refined the candidate themes into main themes and sub themes, then re-read the data set to check if the themes worked and coded additional data within themes that was missed.
Phase 5	Define and name themes to give the reader a sense of what each theme is about.	Identified the essence of what each theme was about and the aspect that each captured in relation to the research question.
Phase 6	Produce the report.	A narrative was created including sufficient evidence of the themes, including extracts from the material gathered from the field work, to support their relevance to the enquiry.

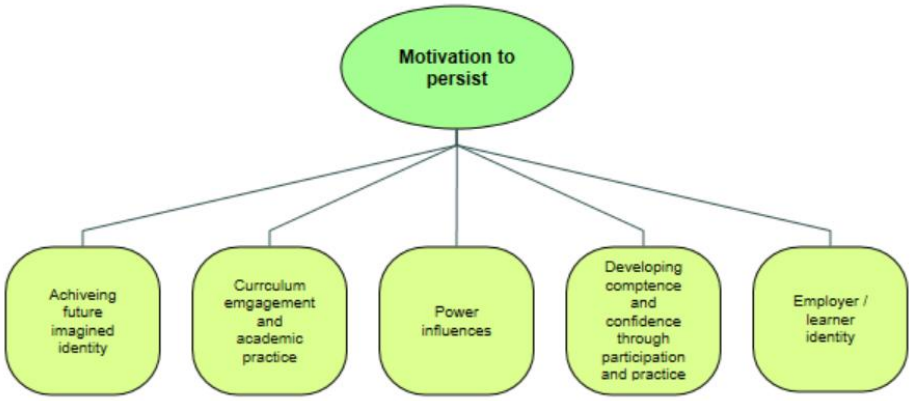
Phase one began by becoming familiar with the material produced from the interviews. To achieve this, it is recommended that a researcher must immerse themselves in the transcripts and involves repeated reading in an active way, noting down initial thoughts. Writing is an integral part of analysis, not something that takes place at the end, as it does with statistical analyses (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

For phase two, the transcripts were uploaded to NVIVO to organise and initially analyse the material, where interesting features were identified by allocating descriptive codes (Silver & Lewins, 2014). In this initial phase Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that as many themes or patterns are coded as possible, as a researcher never knows what might be interesting later. Bryman and Bell (2007) recommend that coded extracts should include some of the surrounding material for context, as the context can be lost when the researcher returns at a later stage. NVIVO does this automatically, which indeed was helpful when going back over the extracts in stage four. Finally, the coded material can be refined into as many different

themes as they fit into, so an extract might be coded many times, once, or remain uncoded (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process began with the learner interviews, followed by the interviews from the employers then the University, with themes being given working titles, grouped and triangulated, resulting in an outline thematic map.

Phase three considered the themes emerging from phase two. This involved sorting and combining the codes into possible overarching themes. This process, which is lengthy became confusing in the early stages given the number of coded extracts and the multiple combinations that they could be attributed to. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest creating a miscellaneous theme to attach the codes that do not belong anywhere, but could be placed later in the process, which was helpful. This phase ends with the material sorted into a collection of candidate themes and sub themes. It was helpful to use NVIVOs mind map functionality to achieve this, which resulted in five candidate themes and nine sub themes emerging. A snapshot of the candidate themes is provided in figure 18. These themes were in their raw state at this stage and elaborated upon in phase four.

Figure 18: The initial candidate themes using NVIVO



Source: author

In phase four the candidate themes were refined, checking if there was enough data to support them. Two levels of review are recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). Level one involves reading through each collated extract again, to check if they do form a coherent pattern. Level two involves checking through the entire data set. By this stage the data was very familiar so it was an easier task, by comparison to the initial sorting stage. Whilst doing this Braun and Clarke (2006) warn against becoming over-enthusiastic with the re-coding and

to stop when nothing substantial is being added. They state that phase four ends when the themes fit together and how they tell the overall story of the data. After listening again to the interviews and re-reading the transcripts, it became clear that whilst the initial candidate themes were valid, they were part of a larger picture which describes the learner journey.

In phase five, titles are given to the candidate themes and sub themes. Some or all might remain the same as the working title, but to assess their suitability it is recommended that a detailed analysis is written about each theme and how each helps to create the overall story in relation to the research question. When considering the title of each theme, Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 93) state that "they should provide the reader with a sense of what the theme is about." This was done, which was helpful as it connected the themes to each other, to the research question and to the theoretical foundation of the study. The final candidate themes are presented in the Findings chapter together with the analysis of each one and their sub themes.

Phase six involved creating a detailed narrative developed from the themes and sub themes. Extracts from the material gathered during the interviews and from the leaver questionnaire were included to support their prevalence and relevance to the research question. The report is presented in the Findings chapter.

3.8 Triangulating the results

Triangulation was used to identify and verify patterns of behaviour from which theory could be created to understand learner motivation (Bryman, 2011). Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that the foundation for interpretation in case studies rests on triangulated materials that are trustworthy and consist of four components: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. They position these conditions as the constructionist's equivalent of internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity. As the interviews included learners, their employers and the University, it was possible to combine and triangulate the data, thus developing multiple standpoints, at different times and from different participants (Denzin, 1978). This was done to improve the trustworthiness of the data "to assess their utility and power" (Denzin, 1978, p. 297).

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this case study was to establish whether the socio-cultural learning concept of community of practice theory could be used to improve the persistence and successful completion of chartered manager degree apprenticeship learners. Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 50) position the theory of social practice at the heart of communities of practice, which involves "the relational interdependency of agent, world, activity, cognition, learning and knowing." Rather than learning being a process of internalisation through teaching, they emphasise that learning is achieved through increasing participation "concerning the whole person acting in the world," (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 49). This makes it suitable and also relevant as the basis for this analysis of apprenticeship learning.

To inform this study, learner interviews took place with four groups, a leaver group and three groups at different stages of the CMDA; 6 months (completed first module), 18 months (half way through) and finally those at the end of their learning programme, with the end point assessment (EPA) to complete. The information received from interviews and questionnaires was systematically analysed to identify themes that influenced motivation and persistence. These experiences and perspectives were then triangulated with information from their employers and the University.

4.2 Interviewee participants profiles and coding

Data provided by the Universities MIS team revealed that the profile of learners on the University's CMDA programme was similar to the IFF research (2022), Engeli and Turner (2019), the Chartered Management Institute (2020a) and the DfE learner age profile (Department for Education, 2023b), underlining the appeal of degree apprenticeships to older and non-traditional learners. Unsurprising then that non-traditional learners defined by one or more of the categories stated previously, was the predominant group in this study. Table 9 provides a profile of the participants. They were predominantly older, 70% were female and their ages ranged from 28 to 60 years old. Educational attainment varied but 37% held qualifications at level 3 or below, mostly GCSEs, or NVQ level 3. The majority (63%) had achieved these qualifications over 10 years ago, for three participants it was over 20 years. Some talked about the difficulty engaging with higher education due to this time gap. The sectors represented were health (53%), education (32%) and the private sector (16%). All the

participants entered the CMDA programme with work-related experience, but most had little or no prior experience of the academic skills needed to study at degree level. Five of the 19 participants had attended university and although it varied from 9 years to 19 years ago, these participants drew on their past experience, giving them the ability to deal confidently with academic practice such as expressing themselves effectively and referencing. Those with lower qualifications, especially those whose last experience of education was GCSEs and those without full level 3 qualifications had problems. This created anxiety and caused some to question their ability, leading them to withdraw, or consider withdrawing from the CMDA programme.

When presenting the findings, the participants identities have been anonymised and replaced with a code, which includes relevant details, including the learner background and length of time on the CMDA programme. Table 11 provides this information. The abbreviations NTL means Non-Traditional Learner and TL Traditional Learner. For example, non-traditional learners that have completed the CMDA are represented as: **comp 1 (NTL), comp 2 (NTL)**, and a traditional learner completer as **comp 3 (TL)**, thus enabling the comments to be contextualised to a participant's own background.

Table 11: Detailed breakdown of interview participants

Group 1: Learner completers (Comp)						
Participant code	**Age**	**M/F**	**Sector**	**Highest qual?**	**How long ago?**	**NTL?**
Comp 1 (NTL)	53	M	Health	HND	>10 years	Yes
Comp 2 (NTL)	60	F	Health	HND	>20 years	Yes
Comp 3 (NTL)	45	F	Health	HND	>20 years	Yes
Comp 4 (NTL)	47	M	Health	HND	>15 years	Yes
Comp 5 (NTL)	30	M	Education	Level 4	5 years	Yes
Total population in Comp group	**7**					
Learners interviewed as a % of group total	**71%**					
Group 2: Learners at the mid point (MP)		**At mid point of programme**				
MP1 (TL)	30	F	Local gov	Degree (2:1)	9 years	No
MP2 (NTL)	33	F	Health	ILM 3	>15 years	Yes
MP3 (NTL)	30	F	Health	NVQ Level 3	>10 years	Yes
MP4 (NTL)	37	F	Health	NVQ Level 3	6 years	Yes
MP5 (NTL)	43	F	Health	GCSEs	>25 years	Yes
MP6 (NTL)	28	F	Health	NVQ Level 3	>10 years	Yes
Total population in MP group	**15**					
Learners interviewed as a % of group total	**40%**					
Group 3: Learners approx 6 months in (New)		**< 6 months**				
New 1 (TL)	56	M	Education	Degree (year 1)	19 years	No
New 2 (TL)	38	F	Education	2xlevel 7	13 yrs & 5 years	No
New 3 (TL)	37	M	Education	level 6	>15 years	No
New 4 NTL)	60	F	Education	level 5	9 years	Yes
New 5 (TL)	35	M	Education	Degree	12 years	No
New 6 (NTL)	26	F	Financial Services	Level 3	3 years	Yes
Total population in NEW group	**17**					
Learners interviewed as a % of group total	**35%**					
Group 4: Learner leavers (Leaver)						
Leaver 1 (NTL)	34	F	Engineering	GCSE	>15 years	Yes
Leaver 2 (NTL)	45	F	Construction	HNC	>10 years	Yes
Total population in LEAVER group	**19**					
Learners interviewed as a % group total	**11%**					

TOTAL POPULATION	58	
INVITATIONS SENT	38	
PROPORTION OF LEARNERS	66%	
ACCEPTANCES	19	
TOTAL RESPONSE RATE	50%	Not including focus group or questionnires
PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION	33%	Not including focus group or questionnires

Source: University MIS system (July 2023)

4.2.1 Employer, focus group and university participant coding

The employer participants together with their sector and participant code can be found in table 12. Comments from focus group participants are coded **FG1, FG 2** and so on. The titles of participants from the University have been used (with the consent of those involved), namely: **course leader, personal tutor, apprenticeship manager** and **head of client relations**.

Table 12: Employer profiles and codes

Participant code	Sector	Number of employees
Employer 1 (Emp 1)	Private sector	1142
Employer 2 (Emp 2)	Education	1000
Employer 3 (Emp 3)	NHS trust	5600
Employer 4 (Emp 4)	Private sector	282
Employer 5 (Emp 5)	NHS trust	5200

4.3 Leaver questionnaire

As discussed in the previous chapter, more experiences and perceptions were needed from learners that withdrew early, as only two learners from this category accepted the invitation to participate in interviews. As an alternative option, an online questionnaire was used which resulted in some clear themes emerging that correlated with the learner interviews. Unlike the face to face/face to screen interviews, nuances could not be observed and explored, but the results provide a useful introduction to the rest of the findings. Once again, the identity of respondents was anonymised. A profile of each respondent with their corresponding code can be found in table 13. The headlines from the survey are bullet pointed below:

- The respondents ages ranged from 25 to 54.
- The majority were non-traditional learners (75%), a similar profile to the interview participants at 74%.
- In terms of academic achievement, two held first degrees, two had GCSEs, two achieved A-levels and two held higher nationals.

- Of the eight respondents, three were from the private sector and five were from the public sector.
- All enrolled of their own volition (autonomous motivation), i.e. the respondents' employers did not ask them to join the programme (controlled motivation).
- All but one agreed that induction was useful.
- All withdrew after the first module, so within six months of starting the programme.

Table 13: Summary of leaver questionnaire respondents

Code	Age	M/F	Highest qual level	NTL?	Motivation	Top motivating factor 1	Reason for withdrawing	20% OJT ?	Sector
LQ 1	25-30	Female	3	Yes	Auton.	A free degree and time allowed by employer to do it.	Could not relate the course to work	No	Private sector
LQ 2	45-49	Male	Degree	No	Auton.	Improving future career prospects.	Not given the 20% time for learning	No	Education
LQ 3	35-39	Male	GCSE	Yes	Auton.	Improving future career prospects.	Problems understanding academic practice	No	Private sector
LQ 4	40-44	Female	Degree	No	Auton.	Improving future career prospects.	Could not balance work and study	No	Education
LQ 5	50-54	Male	5	Yes	Auton.	Gaining a degree.	Could not balance work and study	No	Education
LQ 6	45-49	Female	4	Yes	Auton.	Gaining a degree.	Could not balance work and study	No	Education
LQ 7	45-50	Female	3	Yes	Auton.	Gaining a degree/improving future career prospects.	Problems understanding academic practice	No	Education
LQ 8	25-29	Female	2	Yes	Auton.	Gaining a degree/improving future career prospects.	Changed mind about the course	Yes	Private sector

Source: Author

When asked the main reason for withdrawal, half the respondents stated that it was due to not being able to balance work and study commitments, as they were not able to access their learning time allowance. They were only given time to attend the taught sessions, the remaining balance of their time allowance had to be managed as best they could alongside their workload: *"I gave up the course as the additional requirements of being an apprentice made it unsustainable, as I did not have 20% time to commit to complete my assignments." (LQ 2).* Another was more explicit about the implications on their whole life, not just work commitments: *"It would have been up to me to balance home, work and study." (LQ 5).*

Two cited problems understanding academic practice, such as referencing, critical analysis and expressing themselves academically: *"Many colleagues who signed up to the CMDA, had never written in an academic way and I personally struggled." (LQ 3).* One wrote passionately about the challenges associated with being an older learner and trying to deal with developing academic skills:

"I would have loved the opportunity to complete it over a longer period and also to have more mentoring, it's quite hard to write assignments when you become older and have had a

long time away from academic writing. I found the apprenticeship really really hard to juggle and understand. I still kick myself for pulling out, as my cohort recently graduated." (LQ 6).

Even though these respondents cited academic difficulties as the primary reason for withdrawal, they stated that they were not given their full learning time allowance. Whether being able to access this learning time would have made a difference to their academic progress is a question that cannot be answered, but this is exactly what this time is for and should not be compromised.

When asked if their managers were supportive, all replied yes, even though they had been denied access to their full learning time allowance: *"I had a supportive manager, but I needed my 20% to be completed at home." (LQ 6).* It would appear that the respondents' opinion of their managers being supportive was based on being allowed to join the CMDA and attend the taught sessions; probably also because of a good general working relationship. It became clear from responses to a later question about the level of advice and information received about the CMDA programme, that managers were basing their decision to support their member of staff's application on partial information. Learners were asked if they received enough information on which to be able to make a good decision about joining the CMDA, to which five, or 63% of respondents replied no. With one exception, the respondents stated that the University did not engage sufficiently with their manager to explain the course content and what would be expected of their member of staff during the programme.

To summarise, the predominant reason for learner withdrawal was due to managers not meeting their commitment to provide their members of staff with the full learning time allowance. Given that these respondents felt their managers were being supportive, which implies a good working relationship, answers to the question about pre-enrolment advice and information would suggest that managers were not in possession of the relevant facts on which to base their decision to support, or reject an application to join the CMDA programme. Whether better communication pre-entry would have resulted in the time allowance being made available, or the manager not supporting an application is unknown.

The respondents citing an inability to engage with academic practice raises a question about the purpose of the assessment processes that take place as part of enrolment. Providing support to learners should form part of the University's commitment to the learner and their employer, but it would appear that additional learning support is not provided. Enough

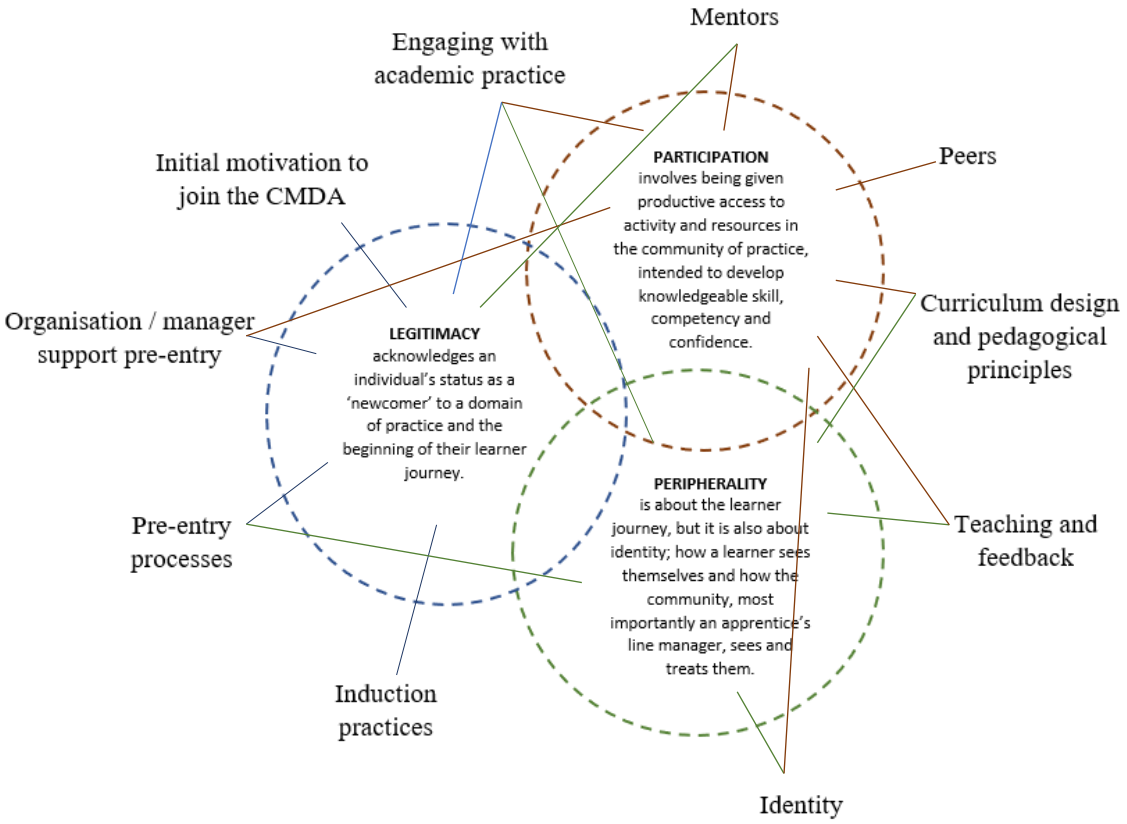
information is gathered to form a judgement about each learner's academic ability, but from the responses, it would appear to be the case that it is not acted upon. The experiences and perceptions of the questionnaire respondents will be explored in more detail later along with those of the interview participants.

4.4 Themes emerging from the interviews

During the process of analysing and coding the material gathered from the interviewees and questionnaire respondents in phase four of the thematic analysis, the candidate themes, although valid, were found to be disconnected and did not tell the overall story in relation to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Instead, the sub themes were found to naturally group around the concept of legitimate peripheral participation, which replaced the initial candidate themes. This was not anticipated or planned, it gradually became apparent while reading and rereading the transcripts and writing a detailed analysis about each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Lave and Wenger (1991) describe the concept of legitimate peripheral participation as the "central defining characteristic of learning viewed as a situated activity," but at the beginning of this study, its meaning and importance to the practical application of apprenticeship learning was not fully appreciated. Using the concept as the candidate themes created a connection between theory and practice and better described the learner journey and its relationship with the research question. To illustrate this and to demonstrate the interrelationships that exist between the theory and practice, the diagram in figure 19 shows and describes each sub theme's link with its predominant candidate theme or themes.

Lave and Wenger (1991) intended the concept to be taken as a whole, rather than considering each part in isolation, which is understandable as it does effectively encapsulate their theory. But, they do go on to break the term into its component parts, such as "legitimacy," "participation," or "legitimate peripherality" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, pp. 36, 37) to position and explain the relevance of each part to the overall theory. When considering its relevance to the CMDA and degree apprenticeships generally, analysing the term is useful as each part holds meaning and through understanding each part the interrelationship and the concept becomes clear. Using the concept also helps to frame the findings as it provides a broadly linear approach, so the CMDA journey can be viewed through the eyes of learners, beginning with their initial motivation to join the programme, as part of establishing legitimacy.

Figure 19: Legitimate Peripheral Participation: the parts, their interrelationship and the themes emerging from the field work



Source: Author

4.4.1 Legitimacy

Legitimacy could be regarded as a contract between the manager and their apprentice. Accepting someone as legitimate satisfies the formal corporate imperative of making sure that the right individual is on the right programme at the right time in their career and should align with the organisations strategic management development aims. Legitimacy acknowledges a learner's acceptance to the apprenticeship programme and the beginning of their learner journey. Achieving legitimacy is a significant step in community of practice theory, as it acknowledges an individual's status as a 'newcomer' to a domain of practice. It is also an indicator of the employer's confidence in their apprentice and their intention to invest time and resources to help the learner progress towards their future imagined identity (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Before a candidate is accepted onto the CMDA programme, or in community of practice terms, before legitimacy is conferred, the member of staff's suitability is assessed based on defined criteria, which is predominantly organisationally contextualised. A strength-based approach can be used (Saville et al., 2020), or past academic achievement, but given the profile of the participants in this study, the criteria are more likely to be work related. For example, an employee's position within an organisation, together with their stated ambition and ability, demonstrated through professional competence over time. The process described by this employer was typical*: "We already had [the applicant's] JDs so we could align their role and past experience with the course to make sure it was a good match. We did refuse two people and found them a different programme that was a better match. We were pretty robust." Emp 2.* One employer made the connection with the work-based nature of the programme: "*Typically, approval would be in line with the job that they are in and career path that they are following, because with the apprenticeship they have to have the link anyway to be able to get the necessary experience to pass." Emp 1.*

At the point that an employee becomes a legitimate participant, their intention to learn is engaged (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29), which implies that legitimacy is a joint commitment between the employee and organisation, with both parties accepting their responsibilities to each other. The University, which is the third party in the learning relationship, accepts the employee's legitimacy and proceeds to assess their academic capability based on an interview, past academic achievement, a skills scan and maths and English assessment. These assessments should help the University provide the required level of support, if needed, to enable the learner to successfully complete the apprenticeship. When the process of conferring legitimacy and academic assessment has been completed, this places the University and the employer in positions of power to either fulfil, or withhold their commitments to support the learner. It also places a responsibility on the learner to demonstrate their intention to learn. In theory, these pre-enrolment processes should provide the foundation for a successful learner journey, creating an environment that allows each party in this triadic relationship to fulfil its commitment to the other.

4.4.2 Peripherality

Peripherality can be thought of as a form of multi agent sponsorship extended to the learner by the employer and university whilst they are on programme.

From the employer perspective, if legitimacy is the formal contract, peripherality could be considered to be the spirit of the agreement between a manager and their apprentice and vice versa. Peripherality is how a manager validates their employee's learner identity by making the necessary accommodation and adopting the right mindset to support the apprentice in the workplace. Without this validation and support, true peripherality that enables the learner time and the ability to participate in a safe space whilst at work and university can become challenging. Ultimately peripherality can be offered to the apprentice, but cannot be forced; it is for the learner to take full advantage of the support and space that it offers.

The University should fulfil its responsibility to ensure that learners are able to become peripheral participants during the enrolment process, by providing them with the appropriate level of support commensurate with their previous experience, thereby enabling them to complete the programme whilst simultaneously developing their academic literacy. Tutors manage learning in the classroom, then workplace mentors facilitate the extension of that learning into their apprentice's work role, ensuring that modules and work-based experience correlate, ideally through work-related projects.

From an apprentice's perspective, peripherality is about the learning journey, but it is also about identity. It is how a learner sees themselves and how the community, most importantly an apprentice's line manager, treats them; not as an experienced manager, but as a newcomer to the community of academic practice (Wenger et al., 2015). The legitimate participant starts their journey from a place of peripherality, where they can experience and become used to unfamiliar practices and a different regime of competence from that which they are used to in their work role (Wenger et al., 2015). This helps them to settle in and to feel a sense of belonging to their community of practice, including their work-based learning environment and peers. Like novice drivers, they should be perceived as wearing L-plates: *"I left school when I was 17, I've not done anything else [academic] apart from little courses at work., but I didn't do A-levels and didn't do a degree." MP 5 (NTL).* Learners enrolling on the CMDA programme might have work related experience; some might have considerable experience as managers, such as this participant from the NHS: *"I am deputy general manager in one of the clinical departments … I started in the Trust when I was 21 and started at the bottom and worked on up so I have a wealth of experience within the organisation" MP 5 (NTL).* However, when it comes to their academic knowledge, many learners are a clean slate and all are treated as such by the University. They all start from the same position of peripherality, regardless of their employee status or prior knowledge. The course leader recognised the need

for newcomers to settle in and be able to make mistakes without being penalised as part of the learning process, commenting: *"We say that level four doesn't count towards the overall mark, so that is the year to build up your knowledge, then move onto levels five and six." Course leader.*

The majority of participants in this study started the CMDA programme without the support that is created by full peripherality. Only academic peripherality was afforded to learners by the University during their block release. Due to the absence of workplace peripherality, theory was not taken into the workplace to extend and develop learning in practice and in most cases, module assignments were completed in the learner's own time

4.4.3 Participation

In a community of practice, participation develops knowledgeable skill (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger et al., 2015) and takes place in the shared learning environment created by an employer and their university partner. Knowledgeable skill has two parts; the first is building theoretical knowledge through participation in the classroom, the second is developing competency by applying theory in practical situations in the workplace with knowledgeable others, which includes senior colleagues, peers and mentors. This relies on the legitimate participant being given "productive access to activity in the community of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 110). If time to develop competency in the workplace is not afforded to the learner, the CMDA becomes a part time course with block release (Lester, 2020). It also fails to capitalise on the opportunity that apprenticeships should offer; to expose the learner to a range of experiences that would broaden the individual's managerial potential. This makes participation a test of legitimacy and power, as this is where the employer and university's commitment to the learner is either fulfilled, or not.

4.5 THEME 1: MOTIVATION TO JOIN THE CMDA (THE COMMUNITY)

4.5.1 Introduction

Legitimacy is conferred by the employer, but the employee should be a willing recipient. As (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29) state: "At the point that a person becomes a legitimate participant, their intention to learn is engaged and a commitment is formed between the employee and their organisation." The reason or reasons for joining the CMDA can affect a learner's motivation and persistence over the duration of the programme. Was the decision volitional/autonomous, or was it controlled/extrinsic (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Next, if it was autonomous, what was their primary motivation, or if controlled, what was their organisation's motives and how did the learner respond?

4.5.2 Was the decision autonomous or controlled?

The respondents in this study were all employed, most in management positions before joining the CMDA programme, rather than being recruited to become an apprentice. This means they had responsible positions in large organisations, a point that needed to be taken into consideration by them and their manager when deciding whether the programme was achievable. For some the decision to join the CMDA was taken after discussion with colleagues at work. Others did not seek the opinion of others but jumped at the chance, so they seized the initiative and convinced their line manager to support them: "*It was all me – yeah, let's do it! I was quite chuffed because I hadn't really considered doing a degree before and I think that's because of my current qualifications, I didn't think that I would qualify. So as soon as they opened that door I jumped through it!" MP 4 (NTL)*

In all but one case the decision to join the CMDA was autonomous, however several respondents from the NHS talked about the need to have a degree as desirable, or demonstrate equivalent experience to be considered for a position above a certain grade. The inference from the NHS participants was the higher you go, the more difficult it would become to demonstrate equivalent experience: *"You have to get a degree to go further in the Trust, but if you are working towards a degree that's okay. And all of the jobs that I would want to go for in the future have a degree on the JD as an essential criteria." MP 6 (NTL).*

"I think academically it would be good to have the degree to run alongside my experience, especially when you are going for the higher jobs as you are up against people that have already got a degree." MP 5 (NTL)

Although experience is recognised as currency that is equal to a degree when applying for a role above band 5 in the NHS, it was clear that the participants felt that degree candidates are favoured when making recruitment decisions for higher level positions. This was contextualised by a senior manager in the NHS who was interviewed as an employer participant. She talked about a grading and pay structure introduced in 2004 called the Agenda for Change. It recognises experience alongside qualifications, but she suggested that in many cases: *"Presenting a degree to meet the desired criteria is a better option than relying on what one says and how one says it, to demonstrate relevant experience, within the limitations of an application form." Emp 3.* She continued: *"If you don't explain how you have gained experience within the job application and you have a really strong field of applicants you may not get shortlisted. It's easier to demonstrate relevant experience with a degree, which includes applying a particular framework, or critical thinking." Emp 3.*

This being the case, it could be argued that NHS CMDA learners are in a controlled (extrinsic) situation, as they are responding to a perceived organisational preference for a degree if they want to progress. However, all chose to enrol on the CMDA and it was clear that their motivation was not diminished in any way as a result. This situation is explained by Ryan and Deci (2000, p. 55) as neither controlled or autonomous, but a middle ground, which they say is common in education. This is where students or learners can perform extrinsically motivated actions with a positive attitude that "reflects an inner acceptance of the value or utility of a task." Therefore, satisfaction comes from the extrinsic consequences to which the activity leads.

4.5.3 Primary motivation for wanting to enrol on the CMDA

The primary motivation for all the interviewees was linked to their future imagined identity (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger et al., 2015). For many, their work had been recognised, resulting in promotion to positions of junior, or in some cases middle management positions. Many did not hold first degrees but had accumulated qualifications at lower levels to support their career journey; the introduction of degree apprenticeships offered the means to further their ambition. Achieving a degree was regarded as a significant asset, as their organisations looked favourably on degree holders when appointing to senior positions. For all the participants, the introduction of the CMDA provided an opportunity to add value to themselves as they developed their careers. Therefore, it was not surprising that when asked

about their motivation for enrolling on the CMDA, their answers corresponded with the IFF research (2022) and Engeli and Turner (2019) survey findings presented in the Literature Review. Respondents overwhelmingly thought that the CMDA would help them to advance their career making them more attractive to their own organisation, or prospective future employers: *"I haven't got a degree so that was the top motivating factor to enable me to progress to the next stage of my career*." *MP 6 (NTL).* They spoke of their ambition to develop their career using the degree as currency: *"I see the degree as helping me to get where I want to be." New 6 (NTL).* Some talked about using the degree as currency to join an MBA programme: *"I think it's going to consolidate the skills that I've got and give me the foundation that I need to go on to the MBA and then go into leadership*." *New 2 (TL).*

Like *New 2 (TL),* many participants commented on a qualification complementing the experience they had accumulated over a number of years. It was clear that this was the basis for their motivation by the way they talked about their aspirations for the future and a source of motivation during difficult periods of the programme. One interviewee with "*only a few GCSEs"* had been with their organisation for 22 years and had worked their way up to the position of deputy general manager: *"I think academically it would be good to have the degree to run alongside my experience, especially when you are going for the higher jobs as you are up against people that have already got a degree." MP 5 (NTL).*

The ability to achieve a degree at no cost to themselves and with paid time off from work was mentioned by some as an added benefit. *"The bonus is that I don't have to pay for it and I don't have to lose income attending this so it's a win win." New 2 (TL).* One employer in the public sector commented: "*Staff are looking to take degrees and master quals without having to pay for them themselves due to the cost, as not many have that much disposable income*." *Emp 3.*

4.5.4 Summary

The majority of learners began their CMDA journey highly motivated. Using Self Determination Theory developed by Ryan and Deci (2020) as a means to understand what lay behind the reason to join the apprenticeship, it was found that all but one interviewee joined the programme of their own volition. They believed that the CMDA would help them to realise their imagined future identity, as it would complement their experience and be valuable currency as they developed their career. Some took a long-term perspective, talking about what that future looked like in terms of the senior positions they would like to achieve,

while the horizon for others was short term, only focusing on achieving the CMDA qualification. As Ryan and Deci (2020) suggest, this autonomous motivation endured and sustained some learners when they struggled.

4.6 THEME 2: ORGANISATION / MANAGER SUPPORT

4.6.1 Introduction

In a community of management and academic practice, where the CMDA forms the basis for developing knowledgeable skills, an apprentice's manager is responsible for conferring legitimacy on a learner, or newcomer, as without them the member of staff would not become an apprentice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Although an essential step in an apprentice's journey, conferring legitimacy is not where the power of the manager begins and ends. Although Lave and Wenger (1991) are clear that the relationship of the manager to the apprentice is not necessarily one of instruction, it does involve controlling the work-based learning environment. However, although the need for access is inherent in a community of practice, legitimacy does not in itself guarantee participation, as managers may choose to promote, or prevent legitimate access. In a learning programme such as the CMDA, examples of prevention could be the learning time allowance not being respected, or "not being given productive access to activity in the community of practice." (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 104). This theme explores how well managers and prospective learners are informed about the CMDA programme prior to enrolment and if they have enough information on which to base the decision to join, or not.

4.6.2 The learner experience

When the participants decided that they wanted to enrol on the CMDA programme, some had to convince their manager and training department of the benefit; for others, it was part of their career development programme. Regardless of the circumstances, in all but one case, it was the participants themselves that instigated the process of discovery and possibility of joining the programme. In fact, managers often appeared to be distant figures in the process. As described in theme 1, when discussing whether motivation was autonomous or controlled, managers were mostly reactive to their member of staffs request, simply agreeing to support their application. A typical response from one interviewee was: "*Yes, it was definitely my decision, yes, and my line manager supported me. MP6 (NTL).* In one case, the manager did not feature in the discussion at all: *"It was my decision and in fact I sort of twisted my boss's*

arm – in fact I told him I was doing it. The HR team put out the information about this so I clicked on the link and thought, yeah that would be very good, I would like to learn more about that. New 1 (TL). This was an extreme example, but in most cases the learner appeared to be taking the initiative in finding out about the programme, then discussing the possibility of joining the programme with their line manager: *"It was driven by me. I made the case to my manager, said I thought it would be useful, um, and they were supportive." Comp 5 (NTL).*

Supportive was the adjective used by the majority of the learners to describe their managers when they sought their approval to join the programme. For a minority this was justified as the manager was well informed and the decision to support their application involved agreeing a plan that allowed time for learning. For most participants, the managers agreement was taken to be support, but approving an application and conferring legitimate participation, which involves support throughout the learning journey, are different. In most cases, access to the CMDA was granted without full consideration of the impact of the programme on the individual or the department, which created problems later. In some cases, the basic principles of apprenticeship learning, such as the learning time allowance, were negotiated away by the learner in return for their manager supporting their application.

When discussing this further with interviewees, it was apparent that many managers did not fully understand and appreciate their responsibility to the learner and to their organisation when granting a member of staff authorisation to join the CMDA. The majority of interviewees thought their managers needed to be better informed about the content of the programme and their responsibility to learners. Comments from interviewees at the midpoint of their learning programme, who said yes when asked if their manager was supportive, gave these replies when asked if, looking back, they felt their managers knew enough about the content of the programme to a) make a good decision about granting access to the apprenticeship and b) understand their responsibility to provide ongoing support: *"They are very uninvolved with the assignments and knowing what the programme is so yes, it would help if they knew more." MP 3 (NTL).*

"I think it would help…yeah. Thinking about other individuals in my group, I know that their line managers aren't as supportive. So yes, I think that more information direct to managers would be an excellent idea." MP 1 (TL).

4.6.3 The University perspective

When dealing with large organisations, the University does face a problem in reaching the manager of the potential apprentice before the decision is made to support an application to join the programme. When talking to these organisations, the University's contact is usually a senior member of staff in the HR and training team. They discuss the structure, content and assessment of the programme and the demands it places on the host organisation, as described by the head of client development: *"When we are recruiting someone new, we go through a PowerPoint with the employer and are quite explicit about the demands and the benefits of having an apprentice." Head of client relations.* It is then left to the HR executives in the employer organisation to communicate internally with their managers and deal with any questions or concerns, often liaising with university staff. For various reasons, too often this internal communication is not as good as it should be: *"I'm not always sure from the conversations I have with learners that their managers fully understand what they have signed up to." Course leader.* To illustrate his point, he went on to give an example of how access to learning can be denied by managers:

"I've had learners in the middle of teaching, or at the start of a day say they have to go for a meeting and you just think…oh come on! I also think with some learners they don't want to miss out on things at work. They feel if they are not there that is evidence that they are not doing their job properly." Course leader

4.6.4 The employer perspective

From the employer's perspective, when it comes to supporting their discussions about how the apprenticeship works with line managers, more involvement from the University would be welcomed. This would include clarifying what the programme looks like, including the content, assessment and reinforcing the statutory requirements. One issue faced by HR and training departments is limited resources to follow up with operational line managers, as their organisations are large and complex. One senior manager responsible for professional development talked about these limitations: "*A colleague who works in my team worked closely with the university, but he is just one person and was only cascading the salient points like when the course is starting, not the depth of information and not directly to the managers, so I think more help would be valuable." Emp 2.* She went on to say that while some managers do not spend enough time understanding what apprenticeships are and their own responsibilities, others are very good. She gave one example of a manager who had

clearly thought about the impact on his department of allowing two members of staff onto the CMDA: "*one manager had two people in his department and he couldn't let them both go because it would have affected the departments productivity, both at uni together and the 20%."* Another senior manager working in a large private sector organisation, when asked if anyone takes managers to one side to tell them what their responsibility to an apprentice is, she said *"Not as much as it should happen." Emp 1.* Because her staff resources are limited they provide detailed information on their intranet, saying this is "*to help [managers] understand their responsibility and what's going to happen, so that is an on-line resource that they have access to. However, there is no follow up to check that the information provided has been fully understood." Emp 1.* She went on to say "*I do think there is a big gap there for us that our university partners could help with.*

4.6.5 Summary

For the majority of participants, not starting the programme legitimately, that is with the full support of a manager fully aware of their responsibilities, was an issue. This risks a poor learner experience, low motivation and potential drop out, which could be avoided. Evidence from participants across several organisations was much the same when discussing the understanding and commitment of their line managers at the start of their CMDA learning journey. This supports the Kantar Public (2019) report, which suggested that more realistic information upfront about the amount of time that is required could help learners and managers assess whether a course is manageable alongside their other priorities.

Current recruitment practice too often relied on the prospective apprentice and the central HR and training team, with the apprentice's line manager being a bystander, simply signing off the application rather than granting legitimacy while being fully aware of their commitment. This created problems later when the CMDA programme started, as access to learning resources was unplanned and sometimes denied. In most cases the relationship between apprentice and manager was reported to be good, which indicates that managers withholding access was not malicious, but due to a lack of understanding of their responsibility to provide planned access to resources at the right time and in the right manner. The majority of participants felt that their line manager would have benefited from a conversation with the University before agreeing to support their application. Employers agreed and felt the University would be best placed to have these conversations, due to the limitations of their teams, in terms of staff numbers and being able to provide detailed programme knowledge.

Legitimacy in community of practice theory is a useful starting point for the University and an employer's operational managers when discussing degree apprenticeship programmes at the pre-entry stage. Conceptually it is easy to understand, as it frames and contextualises each party's commitment to each other, in particular the power of the line manager which has a significant influence on the learning experience and possibly learner persistence.

4.7 THEME 3: CURRICULUM DESIGN AND PEDAGOGICAL PRINCIPLES

4.7.1 Introduction

The authors opinion that learning occurs through participation in the community, rather than through teaching, or as they put it "being transmitted in instruction" conflicts with current work-based learning practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 100). Fuller et al. (2005) suggests their view probably reflected teaching at the time of writing and does not represent current practice. Brown et al. (1989) concurs, stating that this dismissal of formal education is probably rooted in their opposition to the standard view of learning at the time when they were writing their theory. It should also be remembered that the theory contained no temporal dimension, so achieving full participation in a community of practice could take an entire career, whereas the CMDA programme usually has a duration of three years, which means that knowledge has to be compressed, so teaching is an essential aspect.

In his later work (Wenger et al., 2015) reflected on the complexities of designing practice-based curricula that develops knowledgeability, that is knowledge, skill and competency, which he says, is more than competence within one single community of practice. He comments on the connection that is needed to bridge between academic learning, informal learning and workplace practice, meaning how educators, employers and learners manage the boundaries that exist between work and education. Crossing boundaries holds additional meaning for CMDA learners when comparing it to many other degree apprenticeship programmes. Developing future leaders is its purpose. Its broad-based subject content should prepare learners to cross the multiple professional boundaries that they will experience in their operational landscape of practice, as they become more senior managers and leaders. This should be understood by those wishing to join the programme, although during the interviews it became clear that this was something that a small number of participants did not appreciate.

4.7.2 The learner experience

Generally, there was a good response from the interviewees when asked if they felt the curriculum was relevant and if they were developing confidence and competence. The focus group was unanimously in agreement, either by saying yes, they were putting theory into practice, or nodding their heads in agreement. Several commented on what this confidence meant in practice: *"It helps with conversations you have with senior managers as you can hold a better conversation if you have a better understanding of what they are talking about." FG 1.*

The CMDA is a broad-based management programme in which learners are exposed to crossing boundaries and dealing with subject areas that they are not familiar with. The traditional learner interviewees seemed able to cope better with this earlier in the programme. They talked about how they have applied theory to their own work and also how it has helped them to be knowledgeable when talking to colleagues at the boundary of their own community:

"Yes, I have been able to apply the learning. Learning from the finance modules I have applied in an abstract way, because I don't actually deal with finance. But they've taught me methodology that I can apply like KPIs and stuff like that and it's given me an awareness. I've also been able to have conversations with colleagues in strategic finance about the statement of accounts and stuff like that." MP 1 (TL).

For the non-traditional learners, this competence developed more slowly: *"I hadn't done anything like this before and I didn't really understand what was expected. Now I think I have a really good appreciation, but I am a year and a half in. It's taken me a little while to get that." MP 2 (NTL).*

"There is a big difference in me. I think I am probably more annoying now to my manager. Um, actually, because I think I am a lot more critical now. I think more critically and have become more strategic, but it took the best part of two years to get here.

Some, but not all, of the non-traditional learners did struggle to cope with some subject areas, mostly marketing and finance, exemplified by this interviewee:

"The only one that isn't relevant is marketing and every time I get marketing am like …no don't make me do this. But then if you were to speak to someone else, they would say its

finance, or someone else might say project management because it all depends on what you do within your role, or what your interests are." *MP 4 (NTL).*

These interviewees were from public sector organisations and did not understand the relevance of subjects such as marketing to their work, not grasping the importance of crossing boundaries and developing knowledgeability in other areas. However, other non-traditional learners did initially struggle with some subject areas, but talked about how, on reflection, they understood their meaning in the context of the learning programme to their future identities: *"I know some have found the marketing irrelevant but I disagree. I have discovered the marketing was more than just advertising. It's about planning and target audiences and I think you can apply that to so many things like marketing ourselves as a service." MP 1 (TL).*

Reflection was mentioned by several interviewees. The importance of creating time to reflect was regarded as important by Musker (2011) in her study of student nurses. Konstantinou and Miller (2020) noted and commended the inclusion of reflection being built into a CMDA module. Learners commented on how reflection had allowed them to critically evaluate what might be successful or not in a particular context and helped them to express themselves more clearly in academic practice, such as essay writing. Learners also transferred this new awareness of reflection into their workplace, improving their decision making and communication.

Respondents in the Kantar Public (2019) study commented that one of their main motivations was a sense of achievement from early successes. This was mentioned by many participants, exclusively non-traditional learners. They talked about starting with one of the 'harder' modules, such as finance, or in the case of learners from the public sector, marketing, which they felt was not a good introduction to the programme and led to them questioning their decision to join the CMDA. Some talked about joining the programme and *"immediately crashing into a finance module." MP 5 (NTL).* A gentler introduction was suggested to help settle learners in. It was suggested that a module that brought the class together would be preferable, or one that includes reflective professional development: *"Starting off with a module that got people working together would be great, so we could get to know each other, or something that could help us to develop our academic writing skills like how to reflect and develop." MP 3 (NTL).*

4.7.3 The effect of marking and feedback on motivation

Schunk (1995) states that motivation and self-efficacy are enhanced when people perceive they are becoming more competent. But, he continues, that lack of success or slow progress will not necessarily lower self-efficacy and motivation, if individuals are made aware of how they are preforming and adjusting their approach if needed through goal setting, rewards or teacher feedback. Respondents reflected this, stating that marks together with feedback were the most important aspects that could enhance or diminish learner confidence. Early success was also noted by the Kantar Public (2019) study as it found that a sense of achievement from early successes was one of the most important motivational factors, which encouraged learners to believe that they could succeed. This supported Bandura (1989) assertion that two of the most influential sources of self-efficacy are the result of one's previous performance and receiving positive feedback while undertaking a complex task. This feedback will affect an individual's perception of his or her ability to achieve certain outcomes. Bean and Eaton (2002) concur, stating that self-efficacy assessments as one of the most important factors that affect academic and social motivation. When learners believe they are competent they gain self-confidence and develop higher levels of achievement. Tinto (2017) suggests that early warning systems should be established to help those learners that struggle, as if left unaddressed this will lead to an erosion of self-efficacy, undermining performance and motivation.

Unsurprisingly, higher marks equalled higher motivation: *"Marks motivate. I remember that I was really struggling with a module, then we got our marks for the previous one and it was a really good mark so it boosted me. If the mark had been poor it would not have helped!" MP 6 (NTL).* This 'boost' was mentioned by others; it gave them confidence going into the next module: "M*y mark for my first assignment lifted me. Gave me a little more motivation." New 4 (NTL).*

"Definitely 100% its marks. If I see I've done really well I'm buzzing…love it….come on let's do the next one. Similarly, when I've been marked down I think I could have done better. I haven't had any qualms with the feedback." MP 1 (TL).

For some interviewees, low marks pushed them close to withdrawing. In these cases, it was a combination of marks with no manager or mentor support and limited or no access to their learning time allowance that pushed them close to dropping out. In these cases, the learners demonstrated remarkable resilience to persist: "*The grades often make me feel like quitting.*

But the new job has given me new hope. This weekend I will be doing uni work on bank holiday Monday and Friday, as I should technically be at work." MP 5 (NTL).

Improving marks and a developing understanding of academic practice appeared to be linked. As these learners progressed, their marks either improved, or remained stable. This was pronounced in some cases, exemplified by one interviewee in the focus group discussion who was close to withdrawing at the beginning of the programme, but as their academic understanding developed their marks improved and stabilised:

"At the beginning of the CMDA I was quite close to probably not continuing because my marks were not where I wanted them to be. But as time went on I started to get it and my marks have gone up. I feel now that I can progress, even if I get a bad mark I don't take it too much to heart. Now my marks are where I want them to be I wouldn't think about leaving because I have the confidence to improve them and that is motivating for me." FG 1.

The quality and speed of feedback was mentioned as being important by most participants. This was especially true when a learner received lower marks than expected: "*If I continually got low marks it would affect me, but I don't think that would knock me too much, as long as I got comprehensive feedback to input into the next assignment." New 6 (NTL).* Another interviewee agreed. Although this interviewee's mark for the first assignment had been good, when asked about the effect a poor mark might have had on motivation, robust feedback was cited as something that would mitigate her disappointment: *"I would have been deflated. The logical part of me would have thought, that's okay it's the first mark, you know what you need to improve, but I would have expected some really robust feedback and support for the next assignment." New 4 (NTL).*

4.7.4 The employer perspective

Department for Business Innovation and Skills (2013) promotes the need for universities, awarding bodies and employers to collaborate in the development and delivery of degree apprenticeships. Mulkeen et al. (2019) believes as degree apprenticeships gain traction and distribution, this principle is becoming recognised as necessary. Strategic partnerships involving staff from both organisations collaborating to design programmes is regarded as best practice by (Lester et al., 2016). Failure to design the programme from the bottom up, taking into account an apprentice's employee responsibilities and the probability that they could be non-traditional learners, risks an individual becoming overwhelmed, leading to early

withdrawal, possibly before they have completed the first module (Lester, 2020).

One of the employer participants reflected on the disconnect between theory and practice, which supported the need for strategic relationships, discussed by Mulkeen et al. (2019) and (Lester, 2020):

"There is a conflict between academia and the real world. For example, the stuff that needs to be covered to gain a qual is not necessarily what a business in the real world wants to be covered. We don't want our business to be full of people who can write brilliant dissertations, we want people who can do the job and represent us well in the sector." Emp 4.

Another employer participant agreed with *Emp 4's* comments. When asked if their organisation would be prepared to enter a strategic partnership to develop a closer working relationship to develop and deliver management degree apprenticeships, the answer was unequivocal:

"Definitely yes. Technology and methods move quickly so unless the curriculum is continually reviewed, or reviewed regularly and includes people from organisations who are customers, the programme will be out of date within a few years." Emp 2.

Commenting on responses from interviewees about subjects such as marketing and finance not being relevant to them, a senior manager from the same sector as the learners that made these comments disagreed and praised the concept of teaching her employees to cross boundaries:

"The world they work in is a small subset of a very large organisation. They don't know about what other departments do, or how everything gets reported to the board. This is why we want people on programmes like the CMDA because it starts to join up the organisation. I don't feel that if you go into a straightforward part time course that you really get it….you just do the course, whereas vocational qualifications should give someone the ability to go…that's how that connects ..I can understand that because I'm thinking about it in the context of my work, but also the wider organisation. We are changing for the future, not doing the same as we've always done. These programmes are not for the now, they should be for the leaders of the future." Emp 3.

4.7.5 The University perspective

It should be remembered that degree apprenticeships are recent additions to the higher education landscape in England having been introduced in 2015, with the CMDA being launched in 2018 at the University of Gloucestershire. It took time for staff in many universities to adjust to this cultural shift, developing programmes for degree apprentices rather than under graduates, that were both relevant pedagogically and from a work-based perspective, especially ensuring that they reflect current practice. It is fair to say that the CMDA at the University of Gloucestershire is work in progress, but has come a long way in a short time and the new course leader is actively listening to learner feedback.

There was no evidence that strategic partnerships had been formed (Lester, 2020), to enable collaboration in the design and development of the CMDA programme, but the last validation that involved a major overhaul was recent and an employer panel had been established subsequently that could be used for this purpose:

"We get lots of feedback that I know comes to [the director for business engagement] directly from employers, including our own employer advisory panel, which started this academic year. Internally we get feedback from the learners directly. I regularly hold rep meetings, so each cohort has a rep and I talk to them about their experience. At the end of the year we will have run levels 4, 5 and 6 so will have a good sense of what works well and what might need to change." Course leader.

The pedagogical, or andragogical programme design and development, should recognise that CMDA learners are probably already managers having to complete the programme alongside their responsibility as an employee and within their learning time allowance. Therefore, designing an apprenticeship programme like the CMDA should be from the bottom up (Lester, 2020), taking into account an apprentice's employee responsibilities. The first iteration of the CMDA at the University of Gloucestershire did not meet these criteria, resulting in an outcome that confirms comments from Lester (2020) that repackaging existing degree programmes into an apprenticeship does not work, because work-based learning is a field of learning in its own right.

"The CMDA was revalidated in September 2021. They rewrote quite a bit of the assessment design. Apparently quite a few of the assessments were bunched together and there wasn't enough time between teaching and assessment. Originally, before my time, they based the

design on the degree and business and management, but it didn't map properly." Apprenticeship manager.

The construction and pace of the programme since revalidation has improved retention, helped learners and received praise from employers:

"They come in for the 2 days, go away do the reading and research for the assignment, they submit it and by the time they come back in, unless they've taken an extension, they are ready to move on to the next module. The feedback from employers is they like that model. Coming in weekly, given their positions within their organisations, it's a big commitment so this structure helps." Course leader.

When discussing comments from interviewees about subject areas that were not relevant, the curriculum leader agreed with *Emp 3's* comments:

"I think being given the experience of things that are different from your own business is good, it takes them out of their comfort zone. It is a broad-based management programme and they have signed up for it on that basis. The NHS has campaigns like stop smoking, obesity, or weight loss. That's marketing. You might not think about it as marketing - but it is. This will help them to broaden their outlook." Course leader.

The order in which modules are delivered was mentioned as demotivating by some participants. Finance as the first module can prove to be challenging, especially for non-traditional learners. This was felt to be a valid comment and something that could be looked at as part of the end of year review:

"The September intake is gentler but the students in January infill and join an existing cohort that have done three modules. They come into a digital marketing cohort which is quite challenging. We can look at that as part of our review process; we need to take that into account." Course leader.

4.7.6 Summary

The aim of the CMDA is to present managers with a broad practice-based curriculum that develops their leadership skills. Some subjects will be their own area of expertise, other subjects will take learners out of their comfort zone. Wenger et al. (2015) describes this as developing knowledgeability in multiple communities of practice, but learners must also learn to cope with the boundaries that exist between the workplace and education and the

challenges that this presents. The programme should recognise that learners usually hold responsible and busy junior or middle management positions, so should be achievable broadly within the learning time allowance. To achieve this, Lester (2020) suggests that strategic relationships with employers should be formed to inform and validate a curriculum that is relevant, because work-based learning is a field of learning in its own right, with apprentices being active agents and creators of meaning.

The participants at the midpoint of their learning programme and those that had completed felt that their confidence and competence had developed over time, with most non-traditional interviewees agreeing that this took at least 18 months. Non-traditional learners did mention that early success is important suggesting that it would be helpful if the first module was not one of *"the harder subjects like finance*" *New 6 (NTL),* preferring a 'softer' module to help develop their academic skill. This early success was referred to by Kantar Public (2019) stating that a good start has a positive effect on the motivation of learners and increased their

Comments about the relevance of specific modules by those participants from the public sector were not regarded as valid by their employers, or the course leader. When re-reading the transcripts of those participants that made these comments, there were two common features. The first was that they were non-traditional learners; however other non-traditional learners did not make these comments. The second and more significant feature was that when talking about their motivation for wanting to join the CMDA, all these interviewees talked about getting the degree, rather than imagining themselves as future leaders. In other words, it appeared that their motivation was academic success, to satisfy a personal challenge, rather than developing their future professional identity: *"The main thing for me, [long pause], so nobody in my family has been to university number one and secondly because I didn't get any GCSEs I wanted to prove to myself and other people that you can go to university and get a degree without having GCSEs at the start." MP 2 (NTL).* This insight could prove to be valuable pre-enrolment when the University and employers are talking to candidates about their aspirations. The CMDA might not be the best choice of programme for employees that do not want to develop their leadership abilities, or are not regarded by the organisation as future leaders. Joining a programme to achieve a degree which includes subjects that are regarded as "*irrelevant*" *(MP 3 (NTL)* such as marketing and finance, is an indication that the individual has not considered the purpose and application of the programme. It also places the individual at risk of non-completion, which could have an effect on their personal wellbeing and career progression. This programme/aspiration

matching could be checked pre-enrolment, with an alternative programme being suggested in these cases.

The importance of marks as a motivator or demotivator was significant and recognised in the University's Student Charter: You can expect to receive effective and timely feedback on your academic work (University of Gloucestershire, 2023b). Those participants that had received disappointing marks felt a drop-in motivation can be mitigated by good robust feedback, as they regarded this as part of the learning process. This had an impact on a learner's approach to the next assignment, potentially and incrementally improving marks, which in turn has a positive effect on motivation. This power, which is in the hands of the curriculum team, if withheld, could have an adverse effect on progress and on motivation.

4.8 THEME 4: ENGAGING WITH ACADEMIC PRACTICE

4.8.1 Introduction

This theme explores how participants in this study coped with academic practice. It was the first barrier they encountered as they started their learning journey and one of the top three topics raised during the interviews and listed on NVIVO when coding the interview transcripts. An inability to cope with academic practice was cited by two of the ten learner leavers as their primary reason for departure and all the learner leavers as a contributing factor. For most non-traditional learners, it was cited as their biggest single challenge and led to some considering dropping out of the CMDA programme. There are two sub-themes associated with academic practice and connected to conferring legitimacy, being pre-entry processes/recruitment procedures and induction practices.

The Kantar Public (2019) survey reported that learners may drop out when they find the course too difficult. In the survey, some described a feeling of being unprepared for the 'uphill battle' associated with developing study skills and felt unable to reach the standard that was expected of them. In her study of student nurses, Sylvia Jones in Wenger et al. (2015) describes the struggle many new learners had with academic literacies, which made them anxious as they 'grappled' with academic writing and unfamiliar modes of expression. They described this as initial "learning shock", as they first became subject to a different definition of competence than what they were used to in their working lives (Wenger et al., 2015, p. 57). Lester (2020) found that older learners, or those out of formal education for some time, or did not do well at school, struggled with academic practice, including

assignment composition and evidencing.

4.8.2 The learner experience

Most of the non-traditional learners interviewed talked about the initial learning shock described by Sylvia Jones (Wenger et al., 2015): *"That was my biggest challenge, yeah it was. That is the part I found the hardest, not the content or anything. I've never referenced, I've never looked at academic journals or anything." New 6 (NTL).* For one learner, the combination of the time she felt it would take to understand academic practice, in addition to the time to understand each topic and write the assignment was too much and she withdrew after the first module: *"That was a minefield. I didn't expect that but should have! Learning referencing was a month at uni in itself, just figuring out what went where and how you present different citations. I have never had to write an academic paper like that before and it was hard." Leaver 2 (NTL).*

The effect on learners with previous university experience was different. They approached academic practice with confidence, even if their experience was some time ago and they had forgotten much of what they had learnt: *"My first degree definitely set me up for this." MP1 (TL).* They were not daunted or intimidated by this aspect and their motivation was not diminished, even if they did not get it right in their first assignment, as they could draw on previous learning experience to improve as they progressed:

"I'*m quite a natural academic person in that I like learning from written work. I like reading, I always have done so, I am fortunate in that regard. I must admit that I was fortunate to get a very good grade on my first assignment, but the feedback was very clear and I knew that I hadn't put any thought into doing it properly, I didn't do the referencing properly. New 3 (TL).*

This casual approach to academic practice was expressed by another traditional learner who left university 12 years ago:

"I think I did it [the assignment] quite quickly. What I got caught out on was not paraphrasing and put in big chunks of a reference taken straight from the literature. I just needed the clarification that I got back in the feedback that what I was doing was right, as I had doubts, you know, have things changed?" New 5 (TL).

All of the participants that had just completed their first module reflected on how they coped with academic practice, some actually used the same words as Sylvia Jones: *"I'm grappling*

with it and that analytical critical thinking type of writing. I can think that way but actually getting it down on paper is hard!" New 4 (NTL).

The majority of interviewees felt the University could have provided more help. The comment about the University not being considerate of how much learners have to deal with from *New 6 (NTL)* was particularly interesting. This was mentioned by those in the early stages of the programme, but was not evident in interviews with those at the mid-point, or completers:

"I definitely found that hard and I am still finding it tricky. I'm just not used to it. It's a completely different way of working and I don't think the uni have considered how hard it is, especially at the beginning when you are trying to cope with so much. It's also the academic language that I am not used to, the language that's used in the journals… it's hard to understand." New 6 (NTL).

"Coping with so much" refers to a learner's state of mind, while in the process of settling into the programme; trying to understand the first topic and establishing a work/study pattern with home/study responsibilities. One described the feeling as "*overwhelming" MP2 (NTL).* Not all the comments were critical. For one learner who did not have university experience, but did have experience of a programme at level five commented that the support she received was helpful:

"We were given support on how to write reflectively, within the module I've just done, which was really useful…having those helpful hints. And when you haven't written academically for quite a while its really helpful just to remember …you know….what you should be focussed on." New 4 (NTL).

The first year is difficult for many as they are establishing their learner identity alongside their employee responsibilities. For those that persist, time and practice led to an increasing familiarity with academic practice and university systems. Many at the midpoint looked back and reflected on this time: *"Looking back, if I was to read my first ever piece of work I would probably be mortified now, cos it probably wouldn't be what I would write if I was doing it today." MP 2 (NTL).*

You could hear the panic in people's voices when they were asking questions and getting confused about things. But it was definitely difficult, that first year, for a lot of us. Pulling theories and models in and writing and reflecting on them, it's not until year 2 I really started to understand properly, but that first year was quite intense. MP 4 (NTL).

It is possible that these early experiences led to dropout for some. This is evidenced by those that persisted and the observations they made about other learners in their class groups:

"What is interesting is that we lost people at the first module. We battled through enrolment, then attended induction where all the referencing and academic stuff was gone through, then we got the assignment question. I think a lot of us hadn't done any studying for a few years, we got this assignment question and thought…don't know what you are talking about! And I think people gave up there and then. Psychologically, they thought… I'm beaten, so we lost people there." Comp 4 (NTL).

Some non-traditional learners referred to their previous educational experience, which for many was school or college, and compared it to their experience of becoming a learner at university. This highlighted the differences about the proximity of the teacher to the learner in different educational environments, which differs depending on the level. In secondary education the relationship is close, but in a university environment the teaching staff are further removed, with students taking more responsibility for their learning. Entwistle (1997) describes this as learners developing independent thinking, where the intention to understand ideas for oneself and express them using academic literacy is part of the learning journey. A non-traditional learner whose last experience of education was GCSEs 25 years ago and was now in her second year, reflected on how she found the transition to degree learning at the beginning of the CMDA programme:

"I've never written in 3rd person text before, all those kinds of things…the references. Yes, they touched on where we are supposed to reference and …like if you were at school, if you get stuck you can ask the teacher, but at the time I felt that if you needed help they weren't quick at coming back and you need to move quickly when you are working and writing assignments. At the time I felt there didn't seem to be an appreciation of that." MP 5 (NTL).

As the CMDA progressed this learner realised that what she felt was the teaching staff being unappreciative of her situation, was in fact her own appreciation of the difference between being a learner at university compared to school: *"Now I can see that teaching at uni is different, you have to be more independent, but it's a hard lesson which some might not survive." MP 5 (NTL).*

Another interviewee echoed the point made by *MP5 (NTL)*, but suggested that learners with limited experience should be provided with additional support at the beginning of the programme:

"I left school however many years ago and we didn't do things like that at school, I think for me it was underestimating how much you have to do as in…yes, they say you are having an assignment but that's quite a vague thing to explain. People like me could do with more help at the start." MP 2 (NTL).

A traditional learner noticed the difficulties that her non-traditional learner class mates were experiencing, especially those whose last experience of education was school.

"At university you are not spoon fed, you've got to go off and do things on your own. I'm not sure some of the others are used to that from their previous educational experience, where they had teachers who were spoon feeding them. You have to do it yourself or you are not actively learning, the tutors can only take it so far." MP 1 (TL).

In another example of time playing an important role in establishing a learner's identity, this non-traditional learner found the early modules hard, but at the midpoint of the programme she was feeling comfortable with taking responsibility for her own learning: *"Predominantly they just teach and let us go off, probably because we are mature learners. I think we all understand that it is our responsibility to ask if we have any questions." MP 6 (NTL).*

4.8.3 SUB THEME: PRE-ENTRY / RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES

4.8.3.1 Introduction

The formal entry criteria for the CMDA is much the same as any other degree apprenticeship. Apart from the requirement for an apprentice to be in full time employment, selection criteria are mostly in the hands of the employer. Maths and English are required at level two or the equivalent as a minimum, but if a candidate does not have one, or both of these subjects at the required level, they can complete a functional skills course alongside the apprenticeship. The University's website clearly states the entry criteria.

Individual employers will set the selection criteria for their apprenticeships. Most candidates will have A-levels (or equivalent) or existing relevant Level 3 qualifications, as well as English, Maths and ICT at Level 2. Other relevant or prior experience may also be considered as an

alternative. Level 2 English and Maths must be achieved before the End Point Assessment part of the apprenticeship (University of Gloucestershire, 2023a).

When an apprentice's application to join the CMDA has been approved by their employer, the University, as the third party in the relationship, accepts the learner as a legitimate participant. The University must then commit to supporting the learner to enable them to successfully complete their programme of study. To help them fulfil their commitment, the University assesses the learner's academic capability based on an interview, past academic achievement involving a skills scan and BKSB maths and English screening.

4.8.3.2 The learner experience

The evidence was that realistic advice is given to prospective learners, which borders on dissuasion, but for the participants in this study, any attempt by the University to give a 'reality check' was negated by the prospect of enrolling on the CMDA. Sage advice offered from University staff or colleagues, is a necessary part of the decision-making process, but the initial enthusiasm expressed by interviewees was hard to penetrate. It was apparent that it was not until learners were presented with the reality of the academic expectations that they began to understand the size of the challenge ahead of them: *"To be honest, nothing about the course would have put me off at that point. I was excited to be starting and felt I had achieved something by just signing up. Things like referencing and critical writing all seemed very do'able." MP 3 (NTL*).

4.8.3.3 The employer perspective

Employer participants all took a similar approach when recruiting. Firstly, spreading the net widely to capture all those that are interested, then gradually providing information that becomes increasingly more detailed, emphasising the level and difficulty of the CMDA programme:

"We actually had a Teams interview with each applicant, where we asked them some key questions on why did they want to do it…explaining that…the word we use is painful….it won't be that easy, it will be painful because ultimately there will be times when you will have to do things on your own…to find the time. You are going to have to give something up in your life to achieve the course. We did this because we wanted that evidence of them buying in and understanding exactly what they were in for." Emp 2.

Even using a systematic and honest approach like this, the prospective learner's initial enthusiasm predominated, but for some, the reality was too difficult for them to continue:

"When we offer out apprenticeships you can see all the hands go up and the motivation is high, but when they join the programme it's like…oh my goodness! How do you motivate someone who promises, when you've told them it will be painful, but it's a free qualification, you don't have to pay anything but give your energy and enthusiasm and they still don't get it! I wish I could bottle those people who do have that drive and ambition. It's those that say the right thing but when they are on the course …it's so quick, sometimes its within weeks. You think, my goodness, what's happened!" Emp 2.

4.8.3.4 The University perspective

When it comes to assessing a learner's ability to cope with the programme, the University's head of client relationships, believes that the current processes are good. This opinion was based on a combination of filters that are used to assess a learner's capability, which provides the University with an objective profile of the learner. In addition, an individual interview is carried out, where a member of the client development team presents an overview of the programme, which includes the academic requirements and the possible impact on a learner's time, both inside and outside working hours. When asked specifically how academic ability is measured, she referred to one of the assessments where learners have to provide evidence of their highest level of qualification. This is a condition of funding as it might entitle a learner to be granted accreditation of prior learning (APL), but importantly this also provides a snapshot, or baseline, to judge how academically competent they are.

"They are asked for their highest level of qualification so that should be picked up there. "There is a list of criteria, they have to grade themselves as to whether they feel confident or not. That means that if they grade themselves as five or six we would look into giving them APL, also if they have a previous qual. So that, plus their skill scan, should be enough information on which to base a judgement. The third thing is the BKSB for maths and English which gives a good indication of ability." Head of client relations.

Reflecting on why some learners struggle, the head of client relations was asked if this could be related to an indiscriminate approach to recruitment to hit target learner numbers. This was strongly refuted and it was made clear that recruitment is carried out responsibly. From the

University's perspective there are two main reasons for this; if learners do not complete, income and reputation are adversely affected:

"We spend a lot more time putting people off. I have a really honest conversation. I tell them about the 20% but also that they will need to do additional reading and it's going to be in your own time. Leavers affect our income and reputation, so we have to be responsible. They need to be fully aware – but also about the good things, like it's only a relatively short time and the benefits, but they have to weigh that up. It's more important to us now than in the past that we don't have that attrition rate." Head of client relations.

4.8.3.5 Summary

It should be acknowledged that generally, recruitment is an imperfect process. Motivation or enthusiasm can be high before the programme, but reality bites quickly, as *Emp 2* described, stating that even after a systematic and detailed recruitment process, motivation can disappear within weeks. To counter this, the University could use the pre-entry assessment as an indicator to identify those that might struggle and scaffold support.

Scaffolding is a concept developed by social constructivist Lev Vygotsky used in conjunction with the term zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky et al., 1999). ZPD is a metaphor to describe the gap between what a learner cannot do, but could achieve with the help of a peer, a teacher or a mentor to help them. Scaffolding is constructed around a learner to support them as they develop the skills to bridge the gap, which can be gradually deconstructed as the learner's competence increases. Tinto (2017) advises universities to establish early warning systems to help those learners that struggle, as if left unaddressed this will lead to an erosion of self-efficacy, undermining performance and motivation. He acknowledges that this is no easy task, but as mentioned earlier, on entry procedures can help early identification of those that enter a programme academically unprepared. Enough information is gathered about each applicant to the CMDA programme during enrolment to create an early warning system that would enable scaffolding to take place. Currently the information gathered is made available to the course team and personal tutors to use in their allocated time with learners, but the evidence from learners, especially non-traditional learners, is that more help is needed. The hours allocated for personal tutors to support apprenticeship learners is the same as undergraduate students, but this allocation does not recognise that many of these learners have complex needs and a completely different learning regime. As mentioned earlier, the University accepts learners as legitimate participants from

their employers, therefore it should then fulfil its commitment to exploit the resources that are within its capacity to provide, to enable each learner to successfully complete their programme of study.

4.8.4 SUB THEME: INDUCTION PRACTICES

4.8.4.1 Introduction

Induction is the first step in peripherality; where learners receive their L plates. A short period of induction should help learners to settle in and begin to feel a sense of belonging to their community of practice, including the University learning environment. New learners are exposed to a lot of information during induction, including learning technology, academic practice and support services. It is a lot to take in, especially for anyone that has no prior university experience. Many of the participants appreciated that a lot had to be crammed in, but felt overwhelmed:

"We had a one-day induction and everything was thrown at us that day. I was writing feverishly down where everything was. They kept saying – everything is on the intranet, in your dashboard and the rest of it. Well that might be the case but it was very very confusing where this stuff was." New 1 (TL).

Whilst the traditional learner participants were broadly understanding that new systems can be confusing and only working with them leads to familiarity, for non-traditional learners it was academic practice that was a greater concern. The majority view from this group was that during induction more time needed to be spent understanding referencing and how to structure an assignment. Three comments summed up the majority view, one from a new learner, one from a learner completer and one from a learner leaver: *"It wasn't enough in my opinion, especially for someone who has not been to university so has no experience to draw on." New 6 (NTL).*

"It would have been good to have had something like a separate pre-induction session at uni before we started about referencing, as it so alien to most people and so important to understand if you are doing a degree." Leaver 2 (NTL).

"At first many of us struggled with some things like referencing and academic writing. I hadn't written anything academic for many many years. More help would be great, maybe a

workshop after the induction for those that don't get it when they hear it at induction for the first time" Comp 2 (NTL).

Even though the participants felt that the timing and content of the induction was a good introduction to the University and to the CMDA programme, the non-traditional learners commented that they still needed more help with academic literacy:

"When we started, we had the induction and then you are kind of left to your own devices. Whilst I understand that we are all grown-ups and we should ask if ….but for me personally I found it a daunting experience. Going to uni for the first time, learning that academic way of doing things for the first time alongside learning about the subject and doing my job. It's a lot. MP 5 (NTL).

When discussing ways to assist learners to better understand academic practice, there were differences of opinion. As mentioned, *Leaver 2 (NTL)* thought that a pre-induction session specifically focused on academic practice would be useful, but another participant felt that a pre-induction session would not help: *"If something like that was positioned to me before I had my first module I would probably say…I don't know if I would use this, in all honesty*." *New 6 (NTL).* She made an alternative suggestion:

"I'd probably say it would be more useful if when you come in for your first module, the two days, that there was something on the second day after you have run through those things you need to do and what's required in your assignment. Then, on the second day have a bit of a workshop for about an hour about how to reference, how you structure an assignment and where you can find the resources like Google Scholar and those sort of things."

Another non-traditional learner who struggled with academic literacies, suggested that the Study Support team should be involved as part of induction, either by running a short session, or simply letting learners know what they do and where they are: *"I had a session with the study support team and that was really helpful. They talked about how to write, so I've taken the principles and applied them every time." Comp 5 (NTL).*

4.8.4.2 The University perspective

The course leader was not convinced that any changes are needed to induction, for example, a separate, additional session on academic writing, "*as academic ability is a personal thing, it is not general in that one thing applies to the whole group. Also, it develops over time*

through practice, not in one session." *Course leader*. He acknowledged that there is a lot of information for learners to deal with at induction, in particular the administration, but felt that academic support should take place during personal tutor meetings. At the induction he "*manages expectations*" about the programme, making it clear that they will be challenged. He commented: *"I know the schedule looks scary, I don't shy away from it. I say I know you are aware of this before you signed up, but take a look again before you commit." Course leader.*

4.8.4.3 Summary

It is understandable that learners feel a lot is being thrown at them during the induction session. The teaching time is limited for apprenticeship learners, so a balance has to be struck between how much information is needed to get learners underway, without taking too much time away from the teaching. It was academic practice that the non-traditional learners felt most anxious about, feeling they needed more help, whereas it was systems that appeared to concern traditional learners like *New 1 (NTL).* This supports the point raised by the course leader, that there is no one size fits all approach when it comes to academic ability, as it needs to be differentiated on an individual basis. It was apparent from the interviews that academic ability varied; some picked up the principles quickly, whereas for some it was a continuous struggle. Some talked about needing examples of previous work to help them to understand referencing and how to structure an assignment. Composition was found by Wenger et al. (2015) to be an aspect of academic literacy that non-traditional learners struggled to understand:

"I found it really really helpful when we were given examples to be able to know how an assignment should be structured, as I really didn't know. I wouldn't know if I had to write it all in one block. Now I think I have a really good structure but I am a year and a half in." MP 2 (NTL).

4.8.5 Summary and discussion: engaging with academic practice

It was clear that engaging with academic practice creates considerable anxiety for learners. It was cited by all the non-traditional learners as something that made them question their own legitimacy to be on the CMDA programme and caused some to consider dropping out. Two participants and two questionnaire respondents cited an inability to engage with academic practice as the primary reason for dropping out of the programme and it was a contributing

factor for one other.

All the interviewees talked of developing academic competency along a timeline. Fabian et al. (2021) noted this in their research, commenting that the well-established professional identities of degree apprenticeship learners evolved as they began to succeed in their studies due to enhanced confidence and the grounding in theory. The level of competency varied between interviewees but the longer they persisted, the more likely it was that competency and confidence developed. To demonstrate this, when asked did you ever feel like quitting, one learner who is half way through the programme and finding the course difficult said:

"You just start to pick up the skills along the way. Your writing becomes better and your understanding of how they want to read it and what they want to read. How to pull theories and models in and writing and reflecting on them, it wasn't until year 2 I really started to understand all this properly." MP 4 (NTL).

The only distinguishing feature that accelerates this process is whether a learner joins the programme with relevant academic experience on which to draw, as this appears to engender confidence. By the end of level 5, or year two, learners had developed an understanding of academic practice and although they had not mastered it at this stage, it was no longer an aspect that diminished motivation, or might cause them to withdraw: *"I think if you can get yourself through year 2 there is no point in giving up in year 3 is there?" Comp 4 (NTL).* In Lave and Wenger (1991) community of practice theory, near peers, for example those learners at levels five and six would mentor first year learners, so developing academic skills could be expedited. This is not practical due to time limitations and the employee responsibilities of CMDA learners, but as will be discussed later, there might be other ways to achieve the same outcome.

The experiences associated with being a non-traditional learner and the effect on persistence became a significant feature of this study. Many that were in this category expressed problems coping with developing academic skills, especially early on. Non-traditional participants talked about how they felt, which affected their sense of belonging: "*A lot of us felt that because we had been out of education for quite a while, it was hard to get back into the swing of things … um, yeah, so it was a big learning curve, for me definitely*." *MP 6 (NTL).* Another learner did not feel as if she belonged: "*I feel more comfortable in my work life cos I have proved that I can progress, but when I joined the CMDA, in the beginning especially, I felt that I was not bright enough to be in university and to do the course." MP 5*

(NTL). These comments were in stark contrast to comments from learners with first degrees who spoke confidently and appeared to settle into the degree quickly: "*Even though my first degree was slightly different, I still used the same process of analysing and dissecting what I was reading and think about why might they be saying what they are saying and finding alternative thinking. I think my first degree definitely set me up for this." MP 1 (TL).* These difficulties for non-traditional learners in combination with other issues, mainly associated with time pressures, meant they did not have time to fully engage with academic practice and led to an increased propensity to withdraw. One non-traditional learner leaver that left after the first assignment commented that she felt: "O*ut of my depth, as I had never done anything like this before"* and although "*would have loved to complete it"* felt overwhelmed as they had to learn so many things and did not have the time: *"I was not given sufficient time at work and had very little time to be able to do it at home, so had no option but to leave." Leaver 2 (NTL).*

Some employers were fully aware of the difficulties that their staff encounter, especially when they begin higher level programmes at university. They commented on the surprise expressed by employees when the initial enthusiasm to enrol on a programme meets the reality of the work involved. As previously noted, each employer participant talked about the care they take to advise staff about the reality of higher-level programmes, the commitment needed and how they will need to take control of their own learning. However, they realise it is hard to comprehend if a member of staff has no previous experience on which to draw. This was summed up very well by one senior manager in the public sector responsible for organisational development.

"I think people underestimate the commitment across any programme. The way you have to apply your mind to take on learning. You can't just go into a classroom anymore and expect to be there as a passive recipient. Learners are no longer passive recipients. Teachers are now more facilitators of that learning and the approach is different, so when people go into a classroom now they are really surprised and it does take them a bit of time to get used to it. The taught sessions are about….here are the resources you need to look at, look at Blackboard, talk to colleagues then bring that back in the assignment. People get low marks to start with because they have to manage the transition …it's a change in the brain. You know, they say, I'm an experienced manager, I can manage a really complex situation…yes absolutely you can… but now you have to think about the situation in a different way, you

have to critically appraise that …is that right?…is that wrong? ….have you got an opinion? Emp 3.

Other large employers talked about being honest in discussions with staff, but acknowledged that they cannot fully appreciate what they are being told until they experience it for themselves.

"When I go into a group of staff learners to welcome them onto a learning programme you tell them that the first few months might be difficult and they are like rabbits in the headlights, but you can say that all you want – until they experience it they don't really know. I can add some reality to it now after what I have been through as a degree apprenticeship learner myself." Emp 5.

Only one employer participant described how they use past academic achievement to assess an applicant's suitability for a degree apprenticeship programme. Three of the five learners on the CMDA from this organisation were traditional learners with first degrees.

"We wanted evidence of them buying in and understanding exactly what they were in for. We then asked those successful candidates to submit all their past achievements to date, academic achievements. We were pretty robust. Emp 2.

For other employers, their description of the selection process did not include academic achievement, as they prefer to use experience and work achievements as the primary consideration: *"I don't think we consider past academic achievement. It's certainly not something I've heard as part of our process. It's an interesting point. We tend to look at the career path ahead, rather than where the person has come from." Emp 1.*

By accepting legitimacy, the University implicitly takes responsibility for ensuring that an apprentice is supported in whatever way is needed to achieve the qualification. This is acknowledged in goal 1; point 25 of the University's 2012 to 2027 strategic plan: *We aim to educate fully all who come to us in ways appropriate to their individual needs as well as their commonalities across demographic groups*. There are processes to screen candidates to assess the level of their qualifications as a proxy to gauge their ability to complete the programme, but no proactive action is taken to scaffold support where appropriate. The Kantar Public (2019) report suggested that universities and employers should be more cognisant of an employee's academic background during the selection stage and offer extra support where needed beyond the core offer. An early warning system (Tinto, 2017) and

further investment in proactive academic support, by allocating additional hours for to personal tutors for use with CMDA learners would be welcomed by non-traditional learners.

Power can be applied or withheld by 'masters' in community of practice theory. The weaknesses identified are examples of where the power to help learners is being withheld by the employer and the University, albeit not in a malicious way. If these weaknesses were corrected, the support that would be provided could accelerate a learner's academic ability and lead to early success. Without it, the learning experience can be difficult, as many non-traditional learners 'grapple' with academic practice. Supporting learners to engage at a deeper level and in a broader context as early as possible, to understand the intrinsic value in their programme of study and achieve early success, appears to be an important intervention to support persistence.

4.9 THEME 5: PARTICIPATION, PRACTICE AND IDENTITY

4.9.1 Introduction

"Learning and a sense of identity are inseparable" Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 115).

Before undertaking the field work it was thought that discussions about participation and practice would involve how the statutory learning time allowance that is a requirement of apprenticeship learning was managed and used in the workplace. What emerged was the importance of learner identity and its effect on participation in practice; how learners feel and how they are perceived and treated by their managers.

Participation and practice are central to situated learning, as this is how knowledge, competency and identity are formed and developed (Wenger, 1998b). Lave and Wenger (1991) assert that participation is based on negotiation and renegotiation of meaning, which implies that understanding and experience are in constant interaction and mutually constitutive. This constant interaction is a good description of how degree apprentices develop their competency, as theory learnt in the classroom is applied, with meaning being further developed through negotiation and renegotiation on a day to day basis. To allow apprentices the time to develop knowledgeable skills, there is a legal requirement for employers to provide them with protected time from their working hours each week for 'off-the-job' training (Department for Education, 2022). The time allowance includes time spent at university and time to develop their learning and skills in the workplace. However, for the

majority of participants in this study, time at university was the only time that was protected, with the remainder being treated as either *"I do it when I can fit it in," New 3 (TL)*, or in some cases not at all, with course related activity being done outside work time.

Being unable to balance work and study was the most often cited reason for withdrawal. Four of the eight questionnaire respondents and the two learner leaver interviewees cited this as the main reason. The employer participants in this study that manage apprenticeships at an organisational level, recognised the learning time allowance as an essential condition of apprenticeship learning and funding. But, it was apparent from interviewees that the rules were not known or interpreted differently by many managers at an operational level. It became clear during the interviews that in most cases learners took full responsibility for their own learning, with their managers taking a reactive and sometimes a remote role in the process. In some cases, the manager was not involved at all. It also became clear that the aim of all the learners apart from one, was to use the time allowance solely to complete university assignments, rather than engaging in opportunities to gain a wider experience, or deeper knowledge through "access to a wide range of ongoing activity" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 101). Two interviewees made the decision not to use any of the remaining balance of their learning time allowance after university time had been taken, instead opting to complete assignments in the evenings and at weekends. Others struggled to find the time within their working hours, so assignments were completed partly within working hours and partly in their own time. When analysing the interview transcripts, it became clear that it would be a mistake to believe that the learning time allowance was only about how time was managed, as there was a deeper meaning. The problem was conflict, rather than alignment, between the employee and learner identity, which determined the quality and depth of the learning experience. The majority of managers were not recognising their member of staff's alternative learner identity, therefore as the apprentices did not feel like learners, they did not act like learners.

4.9.2 The learner experience

Before looking critically at what identity means in a work-based learning environment, it is useful to revisit the concept of learning in a community of practice. They define it as social practice that involves an individual learning to become fully proficient in an area of work. It is about the learning journey, mastering new understandings and performing new tasks, which are part of broader systems (Lave & Wenger, 1991). They go on to say that these

systems do not exist in isolation but developed within social communities. This corresponds to how an apprenticeship is defined in practice; by developing professional competency and behaviours over time through a mix of work based and classroom learning and practice (Bravenboer & Lester, 2016).

When discussing identity with interviewees, similar to Taylor-Smith et al. (2019) it was clear that their learner identity was important to them. Although the instant response to the question "do you regard yourself as an employee or a learner?" was to identify as an employee, but most paused for several seconds, then referred to their learner identity: "*I would say an employee. Yeah, I think so…..[pause]…..If people ask me I'd probably say oh, this is where I work but I am also at the uni doing a degree." MP 2 (NTL).* One interviewee went a bit further commenting: *There is definitely a spectrum. Obviously when I am at university I feel like I am a learner doing the degree, but actually because of the modules, I have to bring so much of my work into it and reflect on it so there is a connection there straight away." New 4 (NTL).*

The identity spectrum mentioned by *New 4 (NTL)* was evident during most of the interviews, with participants fluctuating between the identities of employee or learner. However, each interviewee had a predominant position that was either employee: *employee/learner*, or learner: *learner/employee*. The category in which they placed themselves was not affected by whether a learner had just started the CMDA or had completed, or if the individual was a traditional or non-traditional learner. Their sector was not a determining factor either, as there was a mixed response from both public and private sector interviewees. Their response was determined by a mix of whether they felt like a learner and if they were treated like a learner by their employer, in particular whether they were encouraged by their line manager to take their learning time allowance. One interviewee who identified as an employee/learner in response to being asked the question said: *"Definitely an employee, probably for the reason I just gave….I am on the course but not being treated like a learner at work." Comp 5 (NTL).*

Table 14 shows the position of each of the 17 learner interviewees that are still currently in learning. Their position was then cross checked with further comments about their personal approach to learning and how their manager was involved. In every case the interviewee's initial response to where they positioned themselves on the chart was supported with the additional evidence.

Table 14: The employee/learner spectrum

	Employee/Learner	Learner/Employee
Completers		
Comp 1 (NTL)	✓	
Comp 2 (NTL)		✓
Comp 3 (NTL)		✓
Comp 4 (NTL)	✓	
Comp 5 (NTL)	✓	
Mid-point		
MP1 (TL)		✓
MP2 (NTL)	✓	
MP3 (NTL)	✓	
MP4 (NTL)		✓
MP5 (NTL)	✓	
MP6 (NTL)		✓
New learners		
New 1 (TL)		✓
New 2 (TL)		✓
New 3 (TL)	✓	
New 4 (NTL)	✓	
New 5 (TL)	✓	
New 6 (NTL)		✓
Totals	**9**	**8**
NTLs	**7**	**5**

Definitions of the categories and clarity on how each is defined is provided below, together with comments from learners that contributed to their position on the chart in table 12. These profiles closely resemble the categories of learner behaviour presented in the literature review by Fabian et al. (2021) and Wenger et al. (2015).

Employee/learners. The nine interviewees in this category resembled the same characteristics as busy professionals (Fabian et al., 2021), or tourists (Wenger et al., 2015).

They strongly identify as workers and professionals. Their aim is simply to get the degree, with little interest in deeper learning (Wenger et al., 2015). They have low levels of participation with superficial engagement in academic practices: "99*% of my time is consumed by being an employee and any time that I've got to try and focus on the academic side of things is shoehorned in." New 3 (TL).* This group find the work/study balance challenging, to the point where they spend their own time catching up with course work: *"I tend to get dragged into things, so it [the coursework] 100% strays into my home life." New 5 (TL).* The learning time allowance was difficult to achieve for employee/learners, which indicates that their mentor/employer was not close enough to spot this happening and intervene: *"For example, I would aim to take Friday afternoon as 20% OTJ but then something would happen at work at it gets put on the back burner. Before you know it, its Sunday evening and you are doing university work." Comp 1 (NTL).* Or, their manager did not understand their responsibility to protect learning time, leaving their apprentice in the position of learning in their own time: *"If something comes up I will just remove it from my diary and that happens a lot. I then spend my evenings doing uni work" MP 2 (NTL).* It is understandable that situations change for managers, but "*that happens a lot"* implies that this is usual practice.

The employee/learner group did not feel like learners. In some cases, this was because they had not been treated like learners by their managers and because of their predisposition as an employee. They regarded the CMDA as a qualification, rather than a broader learning experience. Fabian et al. (2021) comment that this approach results in no real change in identity. The experience of the learners in this category fell short of what should be expected from an apprenticeship. It was evident their theoretical understanding of the subjects that comprise the CMDA was being developed through their time in class, as was their academic practice, but there was no evidence of practice-based application where skills and competency are developed within social communities, rather than in isolation (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Learner/employees. The eight interviewees in this category resembled similar characteristics to aligned student-workers (Fabian et al., 2021), or sojourners (Wenger et al., 2015). They demonstrated a positive and coherent work-study ethos and desire to engage in deeper learning (Wenger et al., 2015)*: "Every Thursday is my study day, I call it my study day, or CMDA day. I just block it out in my calendar and do anything that is CMDA related, so*

writing an assignment or shadowing a colleague in legal or whatever, that sort of thing." MP 1 (TL).

Learner/employees have a strong sense of belonging to their employing organisation, but also a strong alignment between work and study through coursework and their working practice. The interviewee that most closely resembled the learner/employee profile, had a strong relationship with their manager who was arranging for her apprentice to experience a wide range of ongoing activity: *"She [the manager] arranged for me to talk to people in finance to get their perspectives, like how the system works at [name of organisation], so that will be say an hour meeting and that will take up some of my OTJ time." New 6 (NTL).* Although this interviewee was finding the programme challenging, *New 6 (NTL)* was motivated to develop competency in order to function within and beyond the academic community, resulting in changes to identity: "*The first two modules I've really enjoyed, the one last week, managing finance I struggled with more as maths and numbers are not my thing. So, I'm thinking about reaching out to study support to see if there's any support around modules that maybe not your strong point." New 6 (NTL).* Another interviewee in this category was given time by their employer to complete classwork and had regular meetings with their mentor: *"She [manager] would give me whatever time I need to study and I spent one day each week OTJ learning over the two years." Comp 2 (NTL).*

This group were treated as learners by their managers, evidenced by the managers interest and involvement in the learning programme. Most of these managers encouraged their apprentices to block out time for learning, with one arranging additional resources or learning experiences for their member of staff. As a consequence, there was evidence that those that identified as learner/employees were engaging at a deeper level and made comments that suggested that the experience was changing their identity (Fabian et al., 2021). Although the full opportunity of the apprenticeship was not being realised for the majority in this group.

4.9.3 The employer perspective

The employer participants had not considered the question of identity previously. Each discussed the merits of both identities, but felt their role in organisational development was weighted towards fostering the learner/employee identity. One employer commented on why apprentices should be seen in this way: "*I think we should look at them as learner employees because of their age in some cases, but mostly because through learning they are developing their career and our organisational resilience." Emp 1.* However, operational considerations

moderated these employer participants position, as they have to balance an idealistic viewpoint with business continuity and budgets. What this manager said next was similar to comments made by others*:*

"They [apprentices] are definitely here to do a job, I hear that all the time from managers, so they are probably regarded by the managers as an employee learner, even though ideally, they should be a learner employee. It can depend on age to a certain extent, as if they are coming in straight from school they are more likely to be regarded as a learner employee, whereas someone currently in the job who takes on an apprenticeship is more likely to be regarded as an employee learner. Emp 1.

An CMDA interviewee from this organisation categorised themself as learner/employee and was complementary about the role their manager played in their learning, but *Emp 1* went on to talk about other apprentices in the organisation that were not progressing well: *We are seeing some individuals joining us struggle with that balance of completing the qualification and doing the job."* In most cases *Emp 1* was clear that the principal determinant for a successful or problematic experience was the attitude and engagement of the apprentice's manager.

Another employer commented on the way that her team in organisational development see apprentices: *"We call them staff learners. Just because we are trying to differentiate between their staff role and the qualification they are doing." Emp 2.* She talked about how her team try to encourage managers to perceive and support their staff on apprenticeship programmes: *"I think it's just about helping managers to understand that they have to separate staff from learners, break the two things down. Employees have to feel like a learner to act like a learner. Otherwise they will get drawn into being an employee too easily." Emp 2.* However, there was a mixed response from the apprentices in this organisation, with half identifying as employee/learners and half as learner/employees.

Two points stood out from the conversations with the employer participants. First was the difficulty they faced achieving a consistent approach from line managers in relation to complying with organisational policy and practice. This is because they had no direct line management authority and limited staff resources. Second, that organisational policy focused on compliance with statutory regulations, i.e. the learning time allowance, with no direction on the role a manager should play in using that time to provide a holistic learning experience,

either themselves, or by the allocation of a mentor. Without this direction, the opportunity to create learner employees, or aligned student workers is lost.

4.9.4 The University perspective

It is not surprising that the University participants believe that the learner identity should predominate. *"I think the answer is learner first. We see them as learners who happen to work in an organisation." Course leader*. However, they recognise that learner identity is often not recognised and not consistent, even within the same organisation: *"We are having a problem with apprentices on the same learning programme and in the same organisation being treated differently, not just the CMDA. It's food for thought that we should include that [learner identity] into the initial meetings. Apprenticeship manager*.

Learner identity was a new perspective on apprenticeship learning for university staff, as it was for employers. For both groups, the concept of identity was recognised as a useful way to conceptualise the holistic nature of apprentice learning.

4.9.5 Summary and discussion

Employee/learner or learner/employee; does it matter? The interviewees that identified as learner/employees enjoyed a learning environment where their manager recognised the importance of time for learning, even though only one interviewee's apprenticeship more closely resembled the socio-cultural, situated experience that is presented in community of practice theory. The predominant feature of a learner/employee identity is the way they feel; the learner feels legitimate and is able to practice. It is worth repeating the comments from one employer that summarised very well the position of the other employer participants: *"Employees have to feel like a learner to act like a learner. Otherwise they will get drawn into being an employee too easily." Emp 2*. And the comment from the CMDA course leader*: We see them as learners who happen to work in an organisation." Course leader*.

Roberts (2006) states that predisposition is an important determinant of identity. She points to Bourdieu (1990) who asserts that conditioning develops over time so is resistant to change and transferable between situations. In an interview with Farnsworth et al. (2016), Wenger disagrees suggesting that Bourdieu's theory is primarily about structural power relations, whereas his is a practice orientated learning theory that focuses on structures that emerge from practice. Comments from interviewees suggest that change is possible under the right

conditions with many, even for employee/learners, who talked about experiencing positive change to their identity through developing confidence and competency, or knowledgeability. This is not to deny that findings from the learner survey from Kantar Public (2019) and the study of degree apprentices by Taylor-Smith et al. (2019) are accurate, finding that employee identity was important to learners, regarding themselves as employees even when at university, as clearly this is the case. However, if an employee's predisposition could be interrupted temporarily, for the duration of the programme, by a manager that is fully appreciative and accepting of their responsibility, they have the power to make their employee "*feel like a learner and act like a learner*" *Emp 2.* This should enable the learner to engage at a deeper level leading to improved performance (Fabian et al., 2021).

It was clear from the interviews that the learner experience varies from manager to manager, even within the same organisation. As mentioned previously, an HR and training team can be small by comparison to the size of the operational structure of large organisations, so they can find it difficult to manage the relationship between each apprentice and their manager. Lester (2020) comments that managers misunderstanding the role they should play in creating the appropriate learning environment is particularly relevant where apprenticeships are not seen as a strategic activity by the employer. If the corporate strategy does not articulate apprenticeship as a component of its management development process, or there is not a clear line of sight between departmental plans and corporate strategy, then HR and training teams must rely on providing good information and persuasion, or seek greater involvement from their university partner.

4.10 THEME 6: PEERS

4.10.1 Introduction

In community of practice theory, learners develop their knowledge mostly in collaboration with peers (Lave & Wenger, 1991). They state that anecdotal evidence suggests that given the right conditions, the circulation of knowledge between peers or near peers, that is those further ahead in their apprenticeship, spreads rapidly and effectively. This collaboration is a powerful feature of the theory. The Kantar Public (2019) report that explored reasons for apprenticeship non-completion found peers to be an important learning resource and support network. Learners enjoyed the camaraderie when learning and working with peers who were in similar situations to themselves and had a similarly engaged attitude to their course. Working together to solve problems, self-reflection and working out their weaknesses were

highlighted. Without the support of workplace mentors or colleagues, Fabian et al. (2021) found that learners lacked a sense of professional and organisational identity resulting in reduced job performance and low academic achievement.

There are differences between the peer group relationship described by Lave and Wenger (1991) and a peer group of CMDA learners. Community of Practice theory assumes that apprentices start together from scratch on day one and by working together closely they incrementally develop competency. CMDA learners meet for two teaching days for each assignment with lengthy periods of time with no formal contact in between. That said, in conversation with the interviewees it became clear how important the peer group was, but for most the relationship developed over time. This was evident from the conversations with learners at different stages of the programme. Those at the midpoint or completing, recalled how the class relationship developed organically: "*It's a nice group now, it's a really nice group, whereas at first it was a bit….you know how people are…umm, I'm not too sure, I don't want to give anything away (laughs). We are much better now. I think time helps with that." MP 1 (TL).*

4.10.2 The learner experience

Peer support was a strong theme emerging from the literature review and the interviews. The support network provided by peers was the foundation of the community and touched every part of the learners' lives, whether at work, at university or at home: "*It was peer support that helped me as I hadn't referenced anything for a long time." Comp 3 (NTL).*

"We are supporting each other outside the apprenticeship in work more, as a result of the course. Um, so, which is extremely useful." New 1 (TL).

This support benefited all learners, but it was the non-traditional learners that benefitted most. These interviewees talked about how they struggled, especially in the early days of the programme with the structure of assignments and understanding the questions. They overcame each hurdle with the support of their peers: *"Yes definitely. So [name of CMDA learner colleague] helped me a lot with the last assignment. I asked for an extension but in the end I didn't need one. She helped me over my panic and with understanding the assignment question, and I helped her too" MP 6 (NTL).*

One interviewee spoke about how a group of learners, all non-traditional, had helped each other, which supports the assertion made by Lave and Wenger (1991), that learners develop

their knowledge through collaboration with peers: *"Recently I have started meeting some of the girls and we go to the library for a couple of hours where we talk about the assignment and research together. I have consciously started to use the group to help me and help them. MP 5 (NTL).*

What came through clearly from the interviewees at the mid-point of their programme and the completers, was that forming a peer group can take time. Some commented that their peer group community did not become established until the second year. They felt that the support peer groups provide might stop some withdrawing if there was a way to accelerate the process of forming these relationships:

"It definitely does feel like a community, now that we are well into our second year. At first there were little groups, one's and two's, but now everyone has mixed but it has taken quite a long time. So now we are all friends and we are a community, some of us go and work in the library together and that sort of thing." MP 6 (NTL).

"I've made some really good friends through it. It didn't start like that, in fact it took quite a while, maybe the second year, but once we connected everything got better." Comp 5 (NTL).

Some of the participants from the six months group talked positively about a social event that introduced them to other CMDA learners in their class group and those further ahead in the programme. The course leader, recognising the value of developing a peer group early on in the CMDA programme, arranged a night out for all CMDA learners regardless of their year, where learners were able to meet socially. This was referred to by all those that attended and some that did not, but wished they had: "W*e all went for an evening out with a different cohort so it was good to talk to other people. Some of them had started the same as us at level 4, but others had come in at level 5." MP 4 (NTL).*

The two learner leaver interviewees left due to a combination of reasons, but felt that a better relationship with their peer group might have made a difference. It cannot be assumed that belonging to a peer group would have provided the reason and motivation to make them stay, but it was clear they both felt isolated and would have welcomed the support of others: "*So, it was peaks and troughs. Back at uni – yes great, back on track. Then back on your own feeling isolated, without that group motivation." Leaver 2 (NTL).*

As *Leaver 1 (NTL)* had almost reached the end of her second year, it is more likely that she would have persisted than *Leaver 2 (NTL)* who left after the first assignment. This is based on

the time she invested, being one and a half years, whereas *Leaver 2 (NTL)* was dealing with several issues, so persistence was unlikely, but she made a positive comment about how peers might have made a difference: "*There were multiple reasons for me leaving as mentioned, it wasn't just one thing. But I do think a good peer group working to support each other would have helped." Leaver 2 (NTL).*

The sense of community was the most striking feature of this theme. Interviewees half way through their learning programme or at the end spoke with warmth about their peer colleagues, especially how this had affected their sense of belonging and how united they felt as a group. This was articulated by one learner, but repeated by many the other learner participants in the completer group: *"We are all in our final year now so we are going to drag everyone through this, no matter what. There is a sense of belonging that has developed. I have been very lucky, it's a very nice group." Comp 5 (NTL).* Other similar comments are listed below to illustrate how important the peer group relationship is:

"It's important, especially as you are trying to juggle the apprenticeship with your career as well, you need the support of people, just to know where everyone is at and how they're doing. It's like a benchmark for yourself isn't it." New 4 (NTL).

There are class dynamics that can have an adverse effect on forming a peer group; one such experience was described by two learners. It is common that small groups of learners join the CMDA from the same organisation. Often, they do not know each other, sometimes they do, which does not cause a problem unless the behaviour of the group impacts the remainder of learners in the class:

"It was a [name of organisation] club. They already had a working relationship, so for them the peer group must have worked well, but it excluded us. They met at lunchtime to discuss things but the outsiders did not join them. Some of the discussions in class were also dominated by [name of organisation]. That makes forming a peer relationship difficult because they were a clique." Leaver 2 (NTL).

The University does cater for groups over a certain size by keeping them together in closed groups, i.e. not available to other organisations, rather than open groups that are available to all. Closed groups must be of sufficient size, in terms of learner numbers to be viable commercially and provide a good educational experience. The experience described by *Leaver 2 (NTL)* could potentially happen with any open group unless it is spotted early and

managed, by breaking up the group in some way, or by 'forcing' peer group relationships through planned events, rather than letting them emerge organically.

4.10.3 The employer perspective

Of the five employers interviewed, only one had created an in-house peer network as a learning resource and was for staff on all apprenticeship programmes, which appeared to be an example of good practice. The employer recruits all their apprentices at the same time of year, which allows them to create a peer network from day one: *"There is a week-long induction when we get all the apprentices together. In that week we do team building, cover off e-learning, we talk about the company history and its culture before we let them loose into their business areas." Emp 1.*

The HR and training team from this organisation stay in touch with the learners throughout their apprenticeship. Their approach demonstrated that they treated their apprentices as peripheral learners, by giving them a safe space to practice and grow:

"*Someone in my team also carries out peer group meetings with them throughout the year, typically every other month. They get the apprentices together and get feedback. So recently the apprentices have been testing out their presentation skills, taking it in turn to present at the meetings in a safe environment to get experience of presenting to different audiences." Emp 1.*

Where this can be achieved within an organisation, i.e. where learner numbers are sufficient, the advantages of the work-based peer network for the individual and for the organisation are both productive and visible:

"They have that friendship group throughout their career. We do see them getting together. We often see them in the cafeteria at lunchtime and they will be sat as a group having lunch and talking about work. But apprentices that work in the same business area also get together, so for example we have five in the IT area and they will get together to do a project for uni and support each other." Emp 1.

4.10.4 The University perspective

It would appear that usually, peer groups are left to form organically. They usually start with two or three learners collaborating before widening out to include the rest of the class. The

social event that was arranged by the course leader in 2022 was welcomed by those interviewed, as this accelerated the peer group relationship. Other associated initiatives were also introduced:

"The way the curriculum has now been constructed is all the cohorts are in on the same day – all the year groups together. They might not be doing the same modules but they are in together. It occurred to me that one person from one cohort could be standing beside someone in another group in the coffee queue and they don't know that they are on the same programme, but they are in fact peers." Course leader.

4.10.5 Summary and discussion

Community of practice theory promotes peer learning as the primary learning resource (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The main difference between the theory and its practical application in the CMDA programme is the occasional contact between learners that could disrupt relationships, rather than the day to day apprenticeship examples provided by Lave and Wenger (1991): *"Given that we only do the classroom twice every six weeks it's not great to develop a community." MP 2 (NTL).* However, the evidence from those in the later stages of their apprenticeship suggests that peer groups take time: *"In the first year I felt like we were all strangers." MP 4 (NTL),* but peer group learning is a powerful learning resource and once formed they bridge the contact gap, as learners remain in contact between taught sessions: *"We rely on each other as we are all going through the same thing and it can be quite intense." MP 6 (NTL).*

The challenge is how to create peer groups as early as possible in year one of the learning programme. Learners are predisposed to forming peer groups, but a little encouragement could be all that is needed:

"It's definitely difficult, that first year for a lot of us. And we didn't talk about it with each other, we didn't ask each other how we are, but later we all agreed that we should have got together much much earlier." MP 6 (NTL).

All learners benefitted from peer group relationships, but non-traditional learners appeared to benefit the most, with some forming very close relationships that helped to develop academic literacy. Evidence from the field work supports the theory's assertion, that learners develop their knowledge in collaboration with peers (Lave, 1991). If left to develop organically peer groups will develop over time, maybe in the second or third year of the learning programme.

If forced, as was the case for the 2022 CMDA intake, with social events, then peer groups form more quickly. Tinto (2017) suggests that promoting activities that require shared academic and social experiences can help to create belongingness. Taylor-Smith et al. (2019) found that providing pizza lunches helped to develop a computing degree apprenticeship cohort as a learning community. The evening event together with timetabling all CMDA groups together, to encourage mixing at break times was successful and a demonstration of the way that the University can use its power to positively influence learning. It is clear that peer groups play an important part in learner motivation, by supporting persistence and learning momentum in between teaching blocks and also creating a sense of belonging.

4.11 THEME 7: MENTOR SUPPORT

4.11.1 Introduction

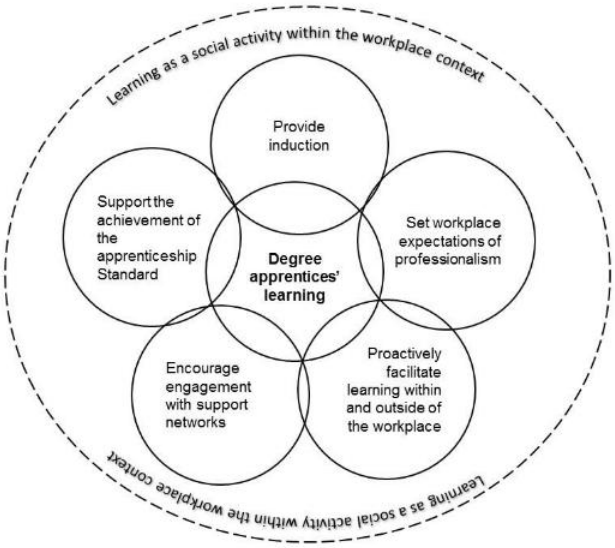
Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 92) do not directly mention mentoring, it is subsumed into the relationships that an apprentice has with peers, near peers and other masters, any of which could be mentors "that organise opportunities to learn." Employers are not required to provide a mentor for their degree apprentices, but it is good practice and they are encouraged to do so by the University. That said, most of the interviewees did not receive mentor support, with only six of the interviewees, or 32%, saying yes and three, or 37% of the respondents to the leaver's questionnaire. Of those that said they had a mentor, only two described support that ostensibly appeared to be mentoring, with the rest more likely to be described as management or coaching.

In their study examining mentoring, Roberts et al. (2019) discusses the confusion that exists over the term, asserting that it is crucial to understand how to provide effective mentoring in degree apprenticeship programmes. They agree with Western (2012) who states that the terms coaching and mentoring are conflated in literature and in practice. When defining the role of a mentor within the context of a degree apprenticeship, Roberts et al. (2019) suggests that it is useful to begin with the apprenticeship standard, as that summarises the knowledge, skills and behaviours expected of role holders. To achieve this, the mentor needs a working knowledge of the apprenticeship standard, ideally through a good working relationship with their university partner's curriculum team. The Kantar Public (2019) report concurred. In its concluding remarks, it was suggested that a single line manager or mentor be assigned to an apprentice to oversee both the work and study elements of the apprenticeship, working with

providers to ensure a holistic learning experience was being provided.

Roberts et al. (2019) present the multi-faceted role of a degree apprentice mentor in a Venn diagram reproduced in figure 20, with the mentor's responsibilities connected to supporting the degree apprentice in a socio-cultural environment. They present a mentor as a learning facilitator and critical friend, helping the learner to develop their professional identity and gaining the necessary competencies, rather than an instructor, as in the case of traditional craft apprentices. This diagram was presented in the literature review but is repeated as a point of reference against which the comments from interviewees can be mapped.

Figure 20: A model for mentoring degree apprentices



Source: Reproduced from Roberts et al. (2019)

4.11.2 The learner experience

There were very different experiences of mentoring and perceptions of its value from both traditional and non-traditional learners. When asked if they were receiving mentor support, six interviewees said yes, with three of the six saying their manager was their mentor: "*The same person, my manager." New 4 (NTL).* Much of what these interviewees described as mentoring appeared to resemble a manager/employee relationship, where the manager took a reactive position to mentoring, rather than the proactive approach described by Roberts et al. (2019). These interviewees were confident that if they needed help they would receive it: *"we have a catch up where he asks how I'm doing, if I needed anything I can just ask." New 1*

(TL). Another described regular catch up meetings: *"I do have a block in my diary which I use with my mentor." New 5 (TL).* This learner spoke about their manager being supportive, but did not want them as their mentor, because he felt he would be judged if he admitted needing help, so was being mentored by someone else in the same organisation: "S*he [manager] is very supportive but it wouldn't be right if she was my work mentor, as I couldn't be honest, so the help would be limited, so I got a different mentor from another department. New 5 (TL).*

Two received mentor support from the CMI, but from the description of the support they received from their CMI mentors, it seemed more like coaching than mentoring. Although it is valuable to seek experiences from the wider community of management practice, it is difficult to understand how the mentoring described by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Roberts et al. (2019) can be provided by someone outside a learner's own organisation: *I sourced a mentor from the CMI. The value that I'm getting from having a CMI mentor versus having a mentor from within my own organisation, well the difference is stratospheric. New 2 (TL).*

Another interviewee with a CMI mentor found it useful, but contact stopped, which would not be the case if a mentor was appointed from their own organisation:

"*My manager, who like I said is supportive, but I wouldn't perceive her as a mentor, as in helping with assignments and giving advice and insights. I sorted it out myself. I went through the CMI and got a mentor through their platform." Comp 5 (NTL).*

The thirteen interviewees that were not receiving mentoring support felt that a mentor would be helpful. Some were clearly disappointed with their manager for either not helping by being a mentor them self, or helping to find a mentor: *"My manager didn't realise they had any part to play when I signed up, as a manager, or as a mentor, which has its own issues. I don't think the two relationships are the same; that is a manager and a mentor. New 2 (TL).*

Several interviewees talked about difficulties that crossed the work/academic boundary that a mentor working within the framework of the Roberts et al. (2019) model could have dealt with. For example, two interviewees talked about how they needed help to find someone with experience in a particular field that could have helped them to understand subject areas where they had no experience: *"Personally, I needed help with the finance module, quite a lot of us did" Comp 2 (NTL),* or marketing: "*For me it was the marketing modules that were difficult and where I could have used some help from someone who had experienced that world."*

Comp 1 (NTL). Many non-traditional learners talked about navigating academic practice for the first time and talked about needing someone to talk to and guide them:

"I definitely would have appreciated help, especially at the start, cos there was a lot of times that I struggled to begin with and close to saying I don't want to do this. So, if I had someone to contact to keep me on track that would have been great. You know even like breaking the question down– that would be great. Sometimes – what does that question even mean!" FG 6.

"I think that [a mentor] would have been incredibly helpful. I didn't have anyone who knew what I was doing that I could go to apart from bugging my tutors, who were always incredibly busy. It's not in me to feel like I'm pestering the tutors." Leaver 2 (NTL).

The optional nature of mentoring and lack of awareness of its potential were evident in interviews with traditional learners and non-traditional learners. Some felt they could handle the programme without mentor support, specifically mentioning their current professional network of relationships, within and outside their organisations and their past academic experience: *"I have got a good network of people in the organisation that I go to if I need help and I have a very good generic understanding of academic stuff, so I don't really need help." MP 3 (NTL).*

Schunk (1995) suggests taking a peer mentor approach, involving pairing new learners with those further advanced in their learning programme. He describes this approach as 'peers as models', which in Lave and Wenger (1991) community of practice terms are described as near peers and other masters. This received a favourable response from many interviewees with most commenting that this support would be particularly helpful in the first six months of the learning programme. Some thought that it would be useful to pair learners from the same organisation, where this is possible: "*I think if you paired people up from the same organisation - one who is new with another that was further on, that would be helpful. Because I had that experience and I felt that it did benefit me. I would be willing to give back to someone else. FG 2.*

"It would have been helpful to have had someone from the 2nd year as a mentor i.e. someone further ahead than you, to show you, for example, how referencing works." Leaver 1 (NTL).

A willingness to participate in peer mentoring was expressed by all the members of the focus group comprising second year learners, but not until they had finished their learning programme:

"I think that giving out our details might cause us problems, as we might be contacted at work or trying to do our own course work. It would be a drain on us when we have our own work to do. I would be more than willing when I graduate to mentor others." FG 2.

FG 3 followed on from *FG2: "That's right, after we finish that will be a lot easier. At the moment I haven't lost any of my duties that I need to do – I still do everything. So, once I finish I will be like - whoa, I have time, I can help other people."*

4.11.3 The employer perspective

Each employer participant was clear about the benefits associated with mentoring. However, when it came to operational practice their role was purely advisory, as the responsibility for arranging mentoring was delegated to each apprentice's manager. The perspective of the employer participants was that managers are aware that mentoring is expected, but in practice *"it is hit and miss." Emp 3.* Their scepticism was reflected in the learner interviews. There was no consistency from line managers when it came to compliance with policy and procedure. This was particularly evident in one organisation, where the HR and training manager was clear that line managers were aware of their responsibilities and experienced enough to provide mentor support:

"Our policy and practice is to leave it to the manager. Every learner has a manager that has an awful lot of experience and knowledge; has done that qualification and beyond, so absolutely, we have people who can guide and mentor." Emp 2.

When asked, the learner participants from this organisation echoed the message from the HR and training manager, but compliance was an issue; only two had mentoring support, three did not. In this example, the interpretation of policy and procedure demonstrates the disconnect between policy and practice. This could be for a number of reasons, for example, a lack of knowledge about mentoring, or confidence about becoming a mentor (Curtis, 2017). One private sector employer said they had no policy when it came to mentoring apprentices, they only used mentors for graduate entrants. This was confirmed by their apprentices, one of whom also highlighted an issue of poor mentoring, which made her reluctant to ask for another: *"I don't have a mentor in my workplace. It is something I've thought about. I had a pretty bad experience with a mentor so it put me off a bit, but it is something I've looked into, it's on my development plan at work so…." New 6 (NTL).*

This employer was aware of poor mentoring and lack of mentoring support being a problem

in the organisation, so rather than relying on managers to arrange mentoring, was trialling a centrally controlled peer mentoring approach:

"What we're trialling at the moment is allocating a peer mentor for an apprentice who is a year or two off programme, so they have been through the same experiences, had the same challenges and buddying them up. This seems to be working really well." Emp 1.

When discussing the motives managers might have for not organising mentor support, which would involve mentors putting their mentees in touch with other departments, helping to broaden their organisational perspective and counting towards their learning time allowance, one employer commented on some managers insecurities:

"I think you would be very fortunate if you were an apprentice and you had that [mentor support]. I would say that some managers might feel undermined or threatened if the person they put on the course came out of themselves and started asking questions and talking to other parts of the organisation…those managers might start to feel quite uncomfortable." Emp 3.

This observation echoed Fuller et al. (2005) comments that communities of practice are presented by Lave and Wenger (1991) as social structures involving relations of power that can be an empowering or disempowering experience for legitimate peripheral participants. Also, that newcomers can pose a threat to old timers therefore creating a dynamic tension, as "each threatens the fulfilment of the other's destiny, just as it is essential to it" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 116).

The need for help from the University to provide good mentoring support was expressed by several employers, highlighted by *Emp 5,* saying: *"Any help to develop and implement a higher apprenticeship mentoring scheme would be great. It is needed and we would welcome the opportunity to work with the University to create a model of good practice."* This supports one of the research outcomes from Mulkeen et al. (2019) who reported an anxiety amongst employers when it came to their ability to support degree apprenticeships through effective mentoring.

4.11.4 The University perspective

The University apprenticeship and curriculum teams are aware that there is no consistency when it comes to mentor support:

"Sometimes there isn't anyone to be a mentor other than the line manager. In most cases the line managers are not effective anyway and don't support them in the right way. It is very important and I keep saying that there should be a mentoring programme for managers or staff who are going to support apprentices." Apprenticeship manager.

Mentoring is not a condition of an apprenticeship, and its value might not be understood by some inexperienced operational managers. An ambition of the University is to introduce a mentoring training programme to help employers that might be anxious about supporting their degree apprentices: *"There should be a mentoring programme before we take on an apprentice. I'm sure that employers would welcome that." Apprenticeship manager.* The University's academic team concur: *"It is an area that needs to be explored, perhaps with the employer, making sure they realise that it's part of their support for an individual, and not just letting them come into uni for the block teaching." Course leader*.

4.11.5 Summary and discussion

The evidence from the field work suggests there is confusion from both managers and learners about what mentoring involves and the benefits for apprentices and the wider organisation. Roberts et al. (2019) explains this confusion as a lack of clarity between the terms coaching and mentoring; managing can also be added to this list. This lack of clarity or confusion is exacerbated due to an anxiety amongst employers when it comes to mentoring degree apprentices. Mulkeen et al. (2019) and Curtis (2017) found that 97% of employers in their studies wanted training to be made available. This plea for training was repeated by the employer participants in this study.

Mentoring was positioned by the employer participants as a delegated authority, so whether or not a learner receives mentoring support is a lottery, depending largely on their managers understanding of its meaning and importance. It should be acknowledged that in some cases the learners themselves were responsible for not wanting mentor support, but this responsibility should not be further delegated from the manager to the learner. If mentoring is to remain as a delegated responsibility, then managers should be helped to become aware of its potential, especially its relationship to the learning time allowance, which is an organisational responsibility. It should form part of a manager's commitment to their apprentice when conferring legitimacy.

Peer mentoring was felt by interviewees to be a good idea and being used in one organisation to support their apprentices, but it should be used in conjunction with and not instead of work-based mentoring. Although it has a part to play, if past learners are to be used, it should probably be viewed as short term, for example for the first one or two modules, rather than long term. This is because these graduates are busy managers and even though may express a willingness to help, such as those in the focus group, their ongoing support cannot be relied upon.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

In an interview with Farnsworth et al. (2016), Étienne Wenger recommends comparing theory and practice, stating that research and theory should inform each other systematically, as using the theory to understand learning has the effect of how to use it and how to support it in various practical contexts. He stated that "it makes sense that a theory of what learning is should inform views about how learning should be." (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p. 8).

Apprenticeship, as described in community of practice theory, should be a situated socio-cultural learning experience. In practice, applying this description to the CMDA programme, learners should be introduced to the theoretical principles of management at the University, then given productive access to activity in the work place that develops competency, or knowledgeability. If access to participation and practice are withheld, for whatever reason, the apprenticeship can become a part time course with block release (Lester, 2020) and the real value of a work-based learning programme to the learner and the employer is lost. For the majority of participants in this study, their learning experience fell short of what it could have been when compared to the description of apprenticeship by Lave and Wenger (1991), or the formal definition provided by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (2013).

5.1 The issue of time

With one exception, all the participants in this study began the CMDA highly motivated. When exploring the motivation of those participants that persisted, short-term highs and lows were noted, usually influenced by a learner's progress with the programme, for example assignment marks, which for some made them question their own ability but did not affect persistence. For the learner leavers too, motivation was not an issue. The two interviewees commented that their motivation to complete the course remained high, but time was the deciding factor, as they could not balance work and study commitments. The time factor was repeated by most questionnaire respondents, who reluctantly withdrew from the programme for the same reason. This corresponded to the Kantar Public (2019) survey, which found that when non-completers were asked why they dropped out, the most common response was an inability to balance work and study, and in some cases home life. The majority of participants that persisted also cited not being able to access learning time allowance, other than the time at university, as their greatest challenge.

The issue of time was not surprising as learners are employees with responsible positions they need to maintain as they develop their management ability as a CMDA apprentice. It is not difficult to understand that they did not want to let their team or manager down as they took on the additional responsibility associated with completing the programme. In some cases, access to learning time was denied or inconsistent due to the employee's learner identity not being recognised by line managers. Some participants highlighted time as an issue in the early stages, particularly the first year, as they adapted to the learning programme whilst balancing other responsibilities. This is a particularly crucial time, as according to the data, this is the period with the highest number of withdrawals. Only a few interviewees referred to their learning time allowance being formally timetabled in conjunction with their line manager. In most cases it was left to each apprentice to manage, with little or no help from the employer or the University. None of the employers mentioned using the learning time allowance creatively, for example to support learners to overcome problems and/or encourage persistence.

When seeking to understand the issue of time, it is useful to start with the legal requirement of off the job learning, which is a minimum of six hours each week over the planned duration of the apprenticeship (Department for Education, 2022). University block teaching is part of the CMDA learning time allowance, with the remainder taken in the workplace. In its guidance to employers, the Department for Education (2022, p. 4) states: "The volume of training that is delivered must be guided by the initial assessment of the apprentice and this may mean that an apprentice trains for more than 6 hours per week." This statement reminds universities and employers of the individualised nature of the support that is expected; support that will enable a learner to persist, identified through their initial assessment. It also emphasises the importance of the learning community that should be created jointly by the university and the employer, providing a supportive work-based learning environment, whilst recognising the employee's learner identity.

The learning time allowance is not just a statutory requirement, it is an essential part of the learning programme, however realistically a learner cannot be forced to take the time that they have been allocated for learning. This has been found to be the case even if initial commitment to the programme is strong. Emp 2 commented on how quickly initial enthusiasm can quickly disappear when learners are faced with the reality of a study programme, but there are positive measures that can be taken.

Once again attention should turn to the importance of true learner legitimacy and recognising an employee's learner identity, by creating a supportive learning community comprising the employer and university at the outset of the learning programme. It is at this point, when the initial assessment has been completed, that an individualised work-based learning plan can be created, linked to the curriculum plan and including expected learning experiences and time allocation. This would bridge the void that currently exists between theory and work-based practice. An individual learning plan would recognise the specific needs of the apprentice and provide the required support that would best help them to persist. It would also benefit mentors, providing them with a concrete rather than passive role in the learning community.

Time can be used tactically to support persistence; six hours is the minimum time allowance but can be increased or flexed during the programme if needed. Working within the rules, the individual learning plan can be dynamic, responding to specific challenges faced by an apprentice, by providing additional time (within a given tolerance) at different stages of the CMDA programme. For example, learners could be allocated more time for the first two modules, or first six months, when dropout is more likely.

5.2 Legitimate peripheral participation

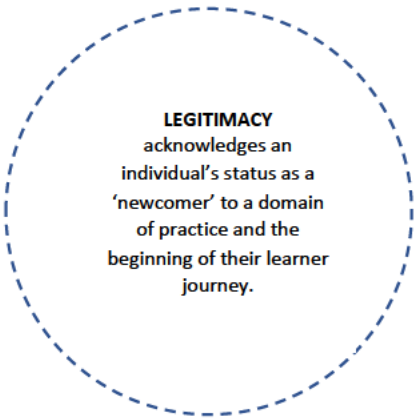
The concept of Legitimate Peripheral Participation provided a lens through which to compare the theory against current practice, including systems and processes as well as the roles and motivation of managers and apprentices. This concept described by Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 35) as "a crucial condition for learning" within a community of practice enabled the strengths and weaknesses of current practice to be identified and recommendations made to improve motivation and persistence. As discussed earlier, the authors did not intend for each of the three components of Legitimate Peripheral Participation to be considered separately, because they assert that synergy is created and the system effective when the three parts work together. However, as demonstrated in this study, each of the constituent parts hold meaning as they represent key features of the apprenticeship journey, in particular the pivotal role that peripherality plays between legitimacy and participation.

5.3 Legitimacy

This study found that true legitimacy, summarised in figure 21, provides the foundation for a successful apprenticeship. It is the most important step in a learner's journey and where the problems experienced by many of the participants originated. Theoretically, legitimacy

creates an environment for a learner (or newcomer), that leads to increasing participation, which in turn provides the motivation for learning and developing competency. In practice, the high proportion of learners dropping out (early), indicates a weakness at the stage of conferring legitimacy that many cannot overcome. For those that continue, the virtuous circle of increased participation leading to increased confidence and motivation over time was apparent in many of the interviews. There was a tipping point, usually towards the end of the second year, where knowledgeable skills, peer group support and the time invested, created momentum that carried learners towards the finishing line. For others, the problems associated with legitimacy issues was a continuing struggle. The outcome from the participant interviews and from the learner leaver questionnaire respondents in particular, suggest that a failure at this stage is the predominant reason for high dropout in the first six months of the CMDA programme. It also creates the conditions for the learner experience for those that persist.

Figure 21: Legitimacy



Legitimacy should begin with a process of discovery for prospective apprentices with the support of their line managers. The current process described by the interviewees was heavily weighted towards the apprentice, with line managers appearing to be distant until they were asked to approve an application. In most cases the process of discovery for participants began with information being provided by the University to the employer's HR and training team. This information was circulated via email bulletin, or on the intranet to attract applications from members of staff, with those interested being directed to their manager in the first instance, although this did not appear to happen in all cases. The discussion that took place between a potential learner and their line manager appeared to be superficial in most cases, as

many managers appeared to approve an application, not fully understanding their own commitment.

There was little difference between the recruitment processes used by the public and private sector organisations in this study. There were some minor differences, but from employer to employer rather than between sectors. The employer participants from both sectors described their internal application process, which comprised mostly of practical information being provided to managers, including start dates, block teaching dates and the need to allow staff time for off the job learning. The University had no contact with the line manager until the learner had been enrolled. Between enrolment and the induction, the manager was invited by the University to attend an onboarding session with a member of the apprenticeship team. At this stage, the enrolment process had been completed so the onboarding session was held predominantly for funding purposes, as the University had relied on the apprentice's line manager being informed of their responsibilities through internal discussions with their HR and training team. This gap in communication and the misunderstanding of managers regarding their responsibilities caused ongoing problems for many apprentices when they were on programme.

Being the 'masters' in community of practice speak, line managers should receive information before prospective apprentices. This would allow them to understand what the CMDA involves including their personal commitment to the learning programme, in particular allowing access to the full learning time allowance. This should enable them to consider the potential impact on their department and whether they are able to support an application. Current practice left this to chance, with many line managers appearing to be unaware of the supporting role they should adopt with their apprentice, as well as their statutory responsibility. The employer participants talked about doing their best to brief operational managers, but described the limitations they faced as their teams are small by comparison to the numbers of departments in their organisations. They all felt that more help from the University would be welcome, not only to bolster their teams in terms of numbers, but also being able to provide more detailed information about the course, the assessment and support needed over the period of the apprenticeship. This includes an assessment of whether the CMDA is a suitable programme of study, based on the manager and the candidates career aims and objectives. The University's involvement at this stage could help to prevent candidates joining the CMDA whose best interests would be served by enrolling on a different programme (Tinto, 2017). It was felt that managers and candidates would pay more

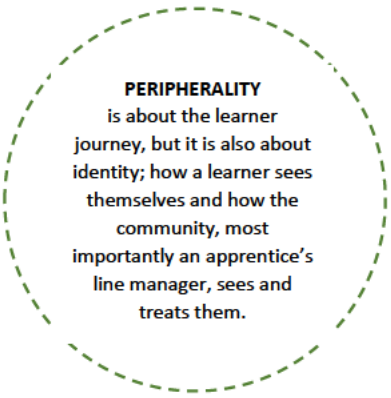
attention to the University than they do from a member of staff from their own organisation, especially if that person was seen as a junior member of the HR and training team.

When an employee had been accepted by their employer as being a legitimate participant, the University accepts this legitimacy and assesses the individual's ability to cope with the CMDA programme. The results from these pre-entry screening processes could inform an early warning system that identifies those with academic backgrounds that might struggle (Tinto, 2017). This would enable the University to scaffold support for the learner that could be gradually deconstructed as the learner becomes more competent and confident. Currently this does not happen but could make a difference to the learning experience, especially for non-traditional learners. For some, their last experience of education was GCSEs over 15 years ago. Many grappled with academic practice and would have benefitted from this support. For many, practice developed competence over time, but for others it was a constant battle. The combination of problems understanding academic practice and only partial access to the learning time allowance had the most significant effect on persistence. For some this combination led to them withdrawing from the CMDA programme, whilst others demonstrated remarkable resilience in persisting. Many acknowledged the support of peers as being crucial, stating that without them they might have left the programme.

5.4 Peripherality

When it came to participation and practice, prior to the interviews, access to the learning time allowance was expected to be the most problematic feature of the apprenticeship for learners. It was, but early on in the fieldwork it was clear that it was also a symptom of a larger problem that starts pre-entry, or during the process of conferring legitimacy, being identity. In community of practice theory "learning involves the construction of identities … through being able to perform new tasks and master new understandings" Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 53). This was found to be true. As knowledge and competence increased, identity changed, especially with learners that had passed the mid-point of their programme. They talked about increasing in confidence, being able to assess situations more critically and feeling more comfortable when talking to senior managers. But another related aspect of identity emerged that had a significant effect, this was how the participants felt and how they were treated by their line managers; were they learners or employees? In the context of community of practice theory, this paradox should be viewed as part of the concept of peripherality, as here, identity takes on a different meaning, as described in figure 22.

Figure 22: Peripherality



Peripherality is the place where learners, or newcomers, begin their journey towards full participation in a community of practice. It should be a safe space where learners start to feel a sense of belonging and can reflect and make mistakes without repercussions, as mistakes should be regarded as part of the learning process. Peripherality was afforded to learners by the University. The course leader described the first year of the programme as not counting towards the overall mark, so it is a time for learners to build their knowledge before moving on to levels five and six. This makes sense in theory, but if a learner struggles and does not get appropriate support then self-doubt begins to build early, rather than competence.

The importance of reflection was raised in the literature review by Musker (2011), Fuller and Unwin (2003) and Wenger et al. (2015), as it helps to bridge the theory-practice gap when integrating academic and work-based learning Then gradually, as they become more established and proficient, learners take on more responsibility as their competence increases. To experience peripherality and take advantage of the opportunity it presents, especially in the early stage of the CMDA, newcomers should be treated as learners by their organisations, especially their line managers and they should feel like learners. In this study, when participants were asked how they felt, there was found to be a spectrum, with learner at one end and employee at the other. Nine described themselves as more of an employee than a learner, or employee/learner and eight described themselves as more of a learner than employee, or learner/employee. Two common features of those identifying as employee/learners was the learning time allowance was not respected by their line managers and that seven of the nine, or nearly 80%, were non-traditional learners. Some of these participants reported having the most serious ongoing problems coping with academic practice and would have benefitted from having protected time to study. The

learner/employees said that their learning time allowance was approved by their managers and usually taken.

In a study of nursing apprentices Wenger et al. (2015) categorised some as sojourners which resembled the learner/employee category and some as tourists which resembled the employee/learner category. Similarly, in a study of computing apprentices, which is more closely aligned to the CMDA, Fabien et al. (2021) found two categories of learner being Aligned Student Workers and Busy Professionals, presenting descriptions that had similarities to the two groups in this study. They actually found a third category described as cast adrift, but there were no participants that fitted this profile, not even the learner leavers.

Fabian et al. (2021) described *aligned student-workers* (*Learner/employee)* as demonstrating a positive and coherent work-study experience, having a strong sense of belonging to their employing organisation, but also a strong alignment between work and study through coursework and their working practice.

The busy professional's profile resembled employee/learners, characterised by Fabian et al. (2021) as strongly identifying as workers and professionals. This group found the work/study balance challenging, to the point where they spend their own time catching up with course work. As most participants in this category were non-traditional learners and were not able to access their learning time allowance, it is likely that they identified more with their professional identity, as this was the place where they felt more comfortable and competent. Whether access to their learning time allowance might have moved some or all of this group into the learner/employee group is not known. However, it is probable that time to practice and develop academic literacy skills would have made a difference, given the level of motivation and persistence demonstrated by these participants.

Fabian et al. (2021) presented the operational factors that motivate or demotivate learners, leading to a level of engagement that is characterised by the two personas in their study. The point made here is that universities and employers should attempt to jointly create a learning environment more inclined to be engaging, thus creating aligned student workers, as it is proposed that this encourages organisational belonging and can support performance. In his study, Wenger et al. (2015) considered the academic factors that affect identity development leading learners to be engaged or disengaged, finding that sojourners demonstrated a deeper commitment to the meaning of academic practice that enhanced their effectiveness in

professional practice. This helped learners to change their identity, as judged by others in their community of practice, based on their professional competence.

Employer participants found the discussion about identity useful. They reflected on the categorisations of learner/employee or employee/learner in their own organisations, then discussed their own thoughts about how apprentices should be treated by line managers. One employer summed up her thoughts about identity which resonated with comments from the other employer participants: *"Employees have to feel like a learner to act like a learner. Otherwise they will get drawn into being an employee too easily." Emp 2.*

5.5 Participation

Participation for the majority did not resemble the socio-cultural learning experience summarised in figure 23. It was narrow and focused on researching the assignment in hand and developing the academic literacy to be able to express themselves effectively. It did not involve exploiting the resources of their organisation to gain the input of specialists, or observe current practice to gain insight and experience. This was most likely a failure of legitimacy and resulted in their learning experience falling short of what it could have involved when compared to the description of socio-cultural learning by Lave and Wenger (1991). The high numbers dropping out in the first six months supports Tinto (2017) and Chan (2016) who assert that early success is important to develop a sense of self efficacy and belonging. This was felt to be important by respondents. Some felt that their introduction to the course could have been easier, for example, participants from the public sector were faced with marketing or finance as their first modules, which was daunting, as these topics were alien to them. It was suggested that when constructing the curriculum, a module that provided a good bridge into the programme would be welcome, such as leadership.

Figure 23: Participation

It was clear that practice was limited to academic work; completing assignments. The opportunity to develop their knowledgeable skills through observation and practice in the work place was not taken, or given.

The most common reason for ongoing motivational problems was coping with academic practice. When asked what enhanced or diminished motivation, most of the interview participants cited assignment marks. Higher than expected marks could enhance motivation, giving learners a lift in confidence. Marks could also diminish motivation, which led some participants to question persistence, but did not result in their withdrawal from the programme. Eleven of the nineteen interviewees and two of the eight questionnaire respondents had problems, or serious problems. All were non-traditional learners and did not have access to the learning time allowance. However, these participants were pragmatic; if a mark was received that was below their expectation, the need for robust feedback was felt to be important, as this was considered to be part of the learning process and helped to mitigate the disappointment. Most interviewees that persisted commented that their understanding of academic practice improved over time, but it was not until well into the second year that they started to feel more confident.

Peer relationships were mentioned by all the participants. The influence of peers cannot be underestimated. Not only were these relationships a source of support and motivation, but importantly peers were also cited as being the reason why some persisted. Of the two learner leavers, one left after the first assignment, so did not have time to establish a relationship with her peer group, but the other leaver withdrew in the second year and commented that she had no peer group support. There was a combination of reasons for this participant leaving, most notably not being able to combine work and study, but she commented that being part of a peer group might have made a difference. Evidence provided by participants suggested that while peer groups kept learners on programme, the relationship took time to develop, sometimes not being properly established until the second year. An initiative taken by the course leader to accelerate the formation of peer groups was well received. He arranged an evening social event and invited learners from all year groups. Those participants that attended felt it was a good move, not only creating a peer group bond between those that attended, but it was also a talking point that drew in others that could not attend. The course leader also organised the CMDA timetable so that learners from all year groups were in university on the same days, which meant they could have coffee and lunch together to further cement peer group relationships.

In a focus group discussion, peer mentors were suggested as a way to help new CMDA learners cope with the early stages of the programme. It was suggested that they could act as a sounding board for new learners when they are preparing their first assignments and a guide to help them find their way around MyGlos and other University learning resources. All the focus group members said they would be happy to become peer mentors, but only after they had completed their CMDA, so they had the time available to help.

Only three, or 15% of the participants had been assigned mentors. A further three said their manager was their mentor, although from what was said it appeared that the managers were at best providing some coaching, at worst were simply asking how the programme was going and offering support if needed. Two learners were receiving mentor support from the CMI and whilst what they received was useful, it was coaching more than mentoring. Five of the eight questionnaire respondents indicated that they had a mentor, three added that their mentor was their manager in the further comments box. Roberts et al. (2019) comments that degree apprenticeship mentoring can be misunderstood and confused with coaching and management, whereas it is a specific role. Mulkeen et al. (2019) reported that employers were concerned about supporting degree apprentices, in particular about ensuring that their partner university's quality expectation had been met within the workplace. The employer participants all agreed that the role is important to successful outcomes and to the learner experience during the apprenticeship. Several had plans to introduce mentors and one had managers that had volunteered to be mentors, but all of them wanted training and felt the University was best placed to provide it. The majority of learner participants in this study felt that a mentor would provide a means to support their study, with some commenting that they were the only contact between their employer and the University.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

By comparing the principles and characteristics defined by Jean Lave and Étienne Wenger to current practice, it was found that their socio-cultural learning theory is relevant and could make a practical contribution to knowledge, potentially improving apprenticeship persistence, rates of retention and achievement.

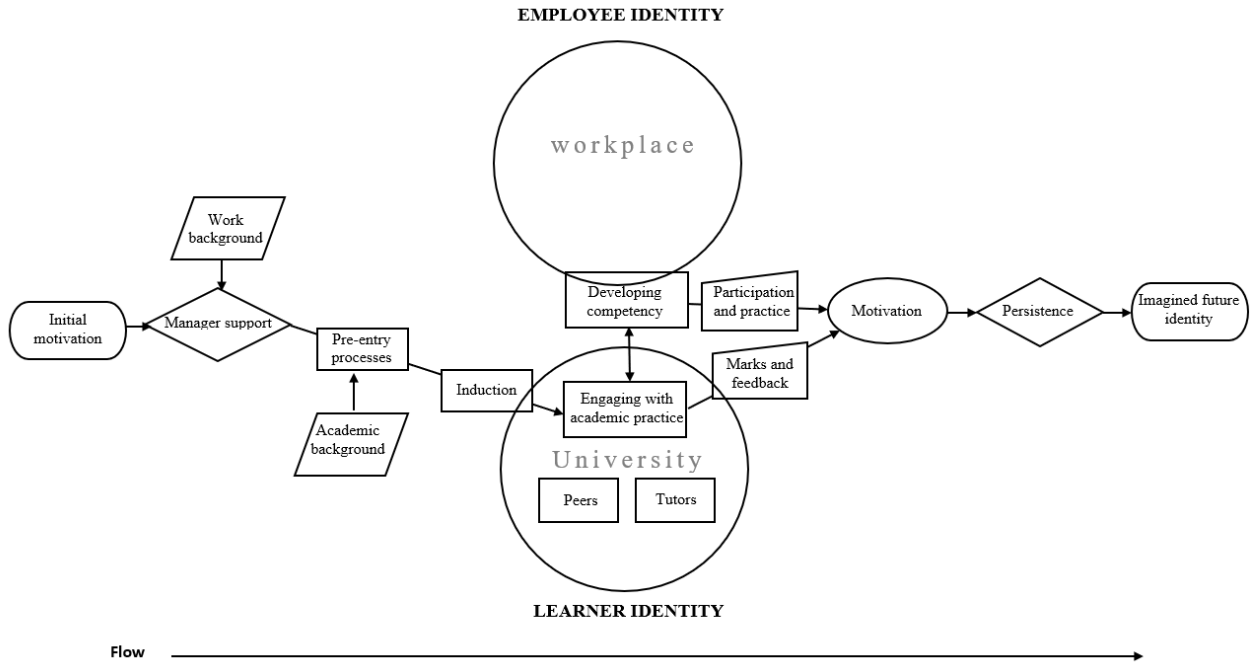
It was clear from the learner interviews that motivation was high at the start of the CMDA, but practical issues of time and/or the right level of support from the beginning of their programme meant that some withdrew, whilst many other learners continued with low levels of motivation, but high levels of determination to persist. Non-traditional learners talked of the ongoing personal and work-related difficulties that they had to deal with, demonstrating remarkable resilience. For completers, motivation came from the support of peers and time invested, i.e. being able to see the finish line. Turning to the objectives of this study, specifically motivation, this was not an issue for many, learners simply needed support to overcome the obstacles that hindered their progress to allow them to proceed. It was also found that managers and organisations should fully understand and adopt the principles and practices of situated learning to realise the opportunities that apprenticeship can offer to stretch employees and make them more rounded and experienced managers and leaders.

6.1 Review of objectives

Objective 1 involved examining the current CMDA learning environment and practices to identify influences that enhance or diminish learner persistence, including the relationships, interactions and responsibilities of learners, employers and the University. This was achieved by creating a time-lapse approach, by interviewing current learners at different stages of the learning programme. The perceptions of learner leavers were gathered through interviews, supplemented with a learner leaver questionnaire to achieve a better level of participation from this group. Comments and descriptions of processes were then gathered from the University and employers to explore the case through more than one lens, which meant that triangulation was achieved, making the findings more credible and dependable (Baxter & Jack, 2008; DeMarrais & Lapan, 2017). The output from the field work was gathered and analysed, which resulted in a detailed understanding of the current CMDA system and a number of themes being identified that were explored in the Findings chapter. Figure 24 provides a diagram of current practice based on the conceptual model of learner persistence

in a community of management and academic practice. It reflects the absence of a collaborative approach to creating a learning environment, low compliance with learning time allowance, the absence of mentors and additional support for non-traditional learners. This disconnect between the employer and university suggests a transactional relationship. The diagrams in this chapter use flowchart conventions to represent the different types of actions, for example processes and inputs, with the circles representing the two learning environments.

Figure 24: The current learning journey based on the conceptual model of learner persistence in a community of management and academic practice

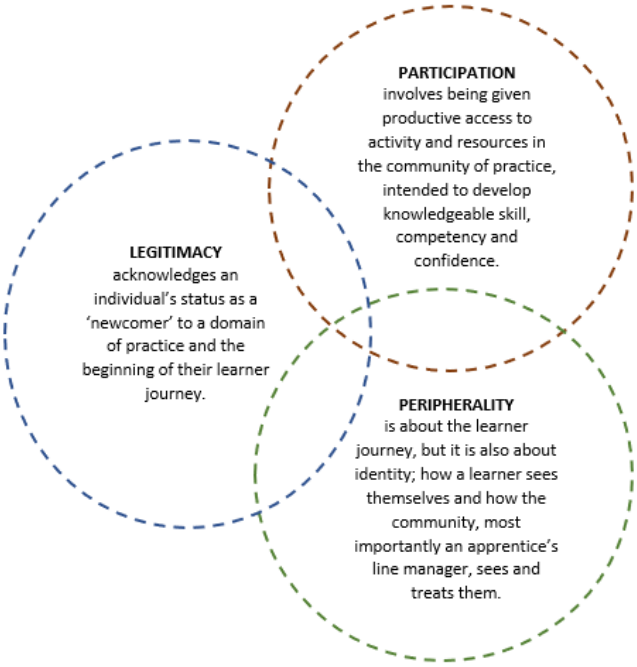


Source: author

Objective 2 involved comparing the principal features that define community of practice theory with current practice to establish if the theory, or any of its parts, could improve learner persistence and consequently increase the rates of retention and achievement. This was achieved by analysing the transcripts from the interviews and using Legitimate Peripheral Participation, repeated in figure 25, as the lens to identify aspects that enhance or diminish the CMDA learner experience. Lave and Wenger (1991) describe Legitimate Peripheral Participation as the theory's central defining characteristic, as it not only involves

the process of learning but includes “social structures involving relations of power.” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 36).

Figure 25: Legitimate Peripheral Participation: the parts and their interrelationship



Source: author

Objective 3 considered the transferability and sustainability of any recommended changes to current practice. The findings pointed to Legitimacy as being the biggest problem area, but also the greatest opportunity to improve the learner experience. Legitimacy can be viewed as a gateway, where the foundation for the learning programme is established between the employer and the University. None of the CMDA learners in this study met the criteria to be regarded as legitimate participants, as they were not being given productive, supported access to activity in their community of practice. For many it made the learning experience more difficult than it should have been and for others the journey ended early.

Without true legitimacy the peripheral status that allows learners to be treated as newcomers and given the space to practice was missing. The lack of workplace peripherality did not prohibit learning taking place for many that persisted, or those that achieved the CMDA. Participants commented that they had developed confidence, skills and knowledge from their CMDA experience. The explanation for learning taking place was a combination of the

peripherality provided by the University together with the learners' own determination and persistence. For those that withdrew, the intrinsic benefits that full legitimate peripherality brings were absent and some learners faced obstacles they could not overcome. The experience for all the participants, those that persisted and those that did not, was their learning experience was adversely affected without full legitimate peripherality. Given this information, it was established that a failure in peripherality does not necessarily result in no learning taking place, but does diminish the quality of the learning experience and is the most common contributory factor affecting persistence for those that struggled and those that withdrew. It is proposed that the closer the University and its employer partners can collaborate to create a learning environment, where learners are legitimate and become full peripheral participants, the better their learning experience will be, with an associated increase in learner persistence.

The second part of objective 3 was to assess whether the principles that could improve the learning experience are transferable and sustainable when applied to current practice. The answer to this question is a conditional yes. Conditional because although the changes needed that would create the conditions for legitimacy are within the capacity of the University and their employer partners to influence, there would be challenges to overcome. These challenges would include changes to practice for both parties and involve cost and efficiency implications.

6.2 Limitations and opportunities for further research

6.2.1 Open and closed groups

When selecting the learners to be interviewed, it was decided not to include closed groups, that is CMDA cohorts from the same organisation or sector. There were two reasons for this decision. First, these learner groups are usually from the public sector and it was felt for the purpose of the research that mixed cohorts including both private and public sector organisations was important. Second, it was felt that the class dynamic and educational experience of a closed group would be different, as members of the class might know each other or had similar work experiences to draw on in class discussions and assignments. In retrospect, this perspective would have provided useful knowledge, as this study could have compared their learning experiences and perceptions to those in open groups. For example, their shared work backgrounds could provide common ground on which to build peer

relationships and sense of belonging earlier in the learning programme, which in turn could help to improve persistence.

6.2.2 Line managers and co-workers

Due to reasons of confidentiality it was decided not to interview the line managers of learner participants, but instead interview the senior managers responsible for training and development within their organisation. The interviewer had long standing relationships with each of the employer participants and trust was clearly evident given the expansive nature of the answers provided. The discussions provided a good strategic overview of the role of apprenticeships that was focused on, but not limited to, management development. They openly discussed their ambitions for the development of apprenticeships within their organisations, with each interviewee providing an honest assessment of their organisation's strengths and weaknesses, with some remarks being made off the record. The comments from senior managers also enabled triangulation of the findings when used in conjunction with the learner and university interviews (Baxter & Jack, 2008; DeMarrais & Lapan, 2017). However, given the critical role that line managers play in work-based learning, highlighted by this study, the experiences and perspectives of this group could provide valuable insight into how organisational strategy and policy relating to apprentice recruitment and learning is communicated by senior management and enacted operationally. Interviewing the co-workers of apprentices might also provide another perspective, in particular to the off the job learning allowance, as the absence of an apprentice while engaged in off the job training might place additional pressure on co-workers for the duration of the apprenticeship. This in turn might affect the line managers attitude towards the apprentice and recruiting future apprentices. Further research that explores the role and perspectives of the line managers of apprentices and colleagues that work in the same team is recommended, as their experience could directly affect line manager relationships, team dynamics and learner persistence. The outcomes could add value to this study and inform recruitment and work-based learning practice as part of the strategic partnership agreement that is negotiated between the University and the employer.

6.2.3 Leavers category

There were only two acceptances to the initial invitation to participate in this study from learners that withdrew, both were from the private sector. A low response rate was considered

possible due to the learner experience having an adverse effect on their personal and/or professional lives, or as they left the programme early simply they had nothing to contribute therefore saw no point in taking part. The contribution from leavers was improved by a good response to a questionnaire, which increased learner leaver involvement to 53% of the total number in the category. Grouping the interview participants and questionnaire respondents together, there was the same number of public and private sector respondents and the number of non-traditional learners was the same. The experiences of interview participants and questionnaire respondents in this group were similar, especially when looking at withdrawal, as for both, balancing work and study responsibilities were cited as the primary reason. However, the depth of information gained from questionnaire respondents was limited by comparison to the interviews. For two reasons, further research with this group would be valuable to explore the reason for non-persistence in greater detail. First, although there was a similar number of leavers from each sector, a higher percentage of learners from the private sector withdrew from the programme (50%) than public sector learners (25%). Further research would be helpful to clarify if there are greater engagement challenges for individuals within the private sector and if so, what are the root causes. Second, to explore the level of support received by private sector apprentices in comparison to their public sector colleagues, in particular line managers understanding of their responsibility to the apprentice within the learning programme.

6.2.4 The apprenticeship levy

Unintended consequences of the apprenticeship levy were raised by this study. First, there were challenges for some public sector participants with commercial subjects such as marketing and finance, which led to a question about whether the CMDA was the most appropriate programme for some (not all) of these learners. This raises the question of whether public sector organisations such as large NHS trusts with considerable time limited levy pots create pressure on central HR and training teams to spend it, leading to recruitment practice being compromised. Second, if line managers in any organisation, be they from the private or public sector, are spending levy money for apprenticeship training, possibly from a central fund rather than their own departmental budget, might this have an effect? For example, could it make them less concerned with recruitment and less likely that funds will be managed prudently than if spent from their own departmental budget? Of course, the apprenticeship levy derives from an organisation's income, but strategically, is it seen as an

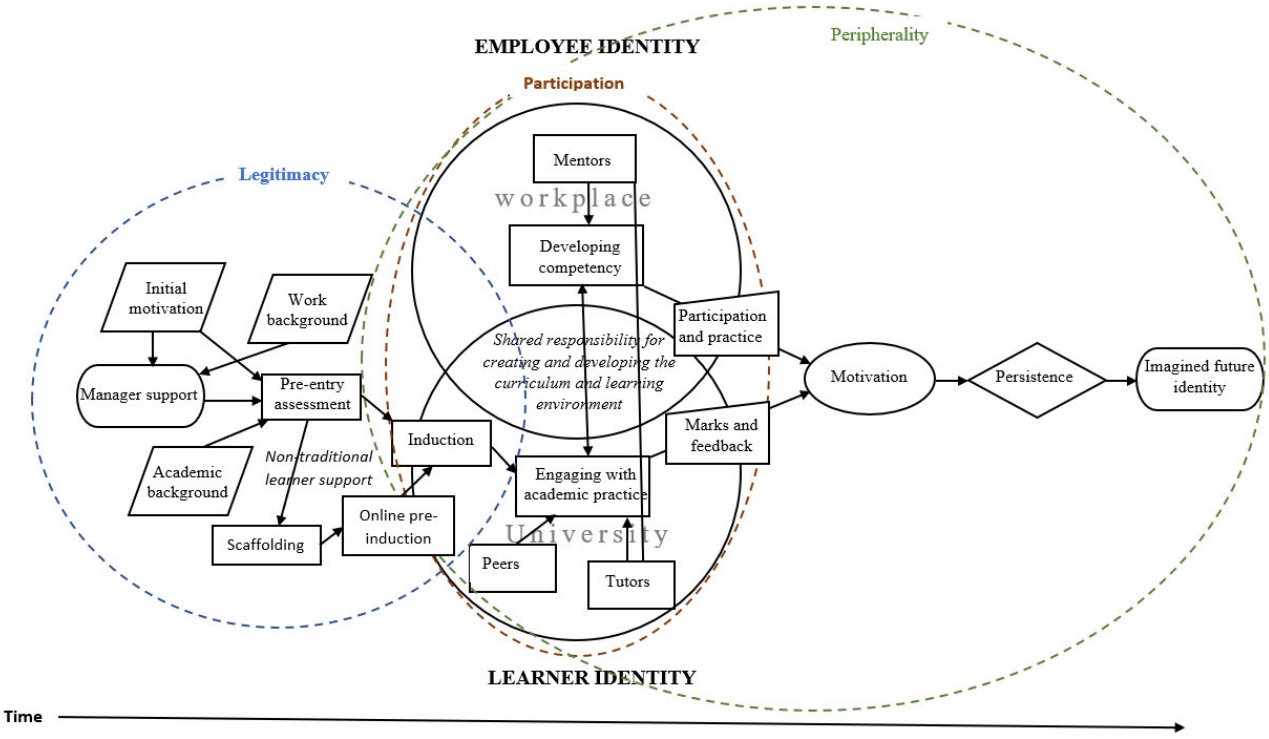
additional tax; funding that must be spent or it will be lost, or as an additional financial resource to develop future talent? This study does not attempt to answer that question, but highlights this as a potential future research project.

CHAPTER 7: CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

Two significant findings emerged from this study that contribute to understanding and developing practice to improve the motivation and persistence of chartered manager degree apprentices. These two interrelated aspects could not have been identified without using community of practice theory as the lens through which to view the learner journey, from the initial motivation to join the CMDA to completing or leaving the programme of study. First, the process of conferring legitimacy was absent, creating problems which many learners battled to overcome during their learning programme, leading some to withdraw. This process is crucial to establishing access to the learning time allowance, support, relationships and access to resources. Second, whereas many models of student persistence or attrition in traditional higher education settings have been produced by leading educational theorists over many years, none have been produced for work-based learning. This study has produced such a model by using the principles found in community of practice theory, the findings from previous studies of work-based learning and influences that interviewees and questionnaire respondents' in this study felt enhanced or diminished persistence. The model provides an overview of the CMDA learner journey, contextualising the importance of conferring legitimacy as an essential first step to establishing a supportive learning environment that endures throughout the learner journey. Using the model as a catalyst to change culture and practice, together employers and the University could promote persistence, encouraging apprentices to become sojourners, or aligned student workers. This assumes that any changes to current practice and the associated additional cost could be accommodated. The most variable factor is the involvement of the line manager, as their understanding and acceptance of what is needed is crucial as they hold the most power to influence the learning experience.

Figure 26 describes the process of how a conceptual model of learner persistence in a community of management and academic practice would work in a CMDA learning environment. Legitimate peripheral participation is overlaid to illustrate the interrelationship of each of the parts.

Figure 26: A conceptual model of learner persistence in a community of management and academic practice



Source: author

7.1 Putting the model into practice

This study found that the latest iteration of the CMDA curriculum and delivery model provides learners with a programme that participants reported as being relevant, providing knowledgeability and improving their confidence in the workplace. It is the processes and communication, defined by the concept of legitimacy that need to be improved. The critical time period is the first year, with recruitment and the first six months being particularly important, especially for non-traditional learners. The changes needed to achieve true legitimacy, which creates the foundation for a successful CMDA programme, should start at the first conversation between the University and their employer partner.

7.2 A strategic approach

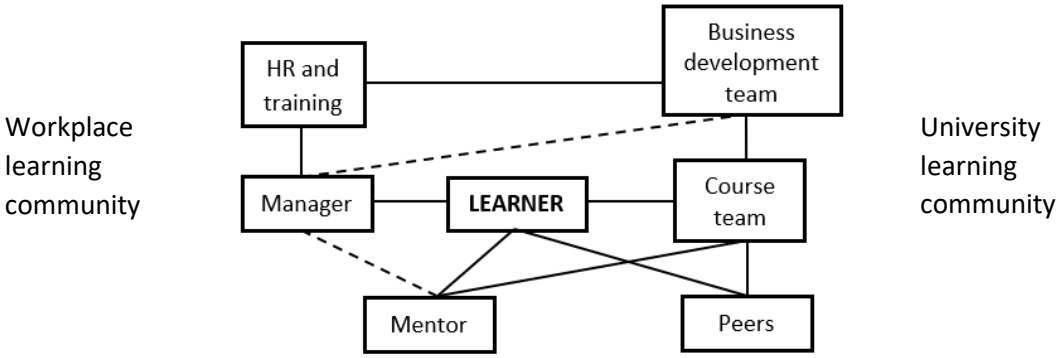
The conceptual model reflects the changes that are needed to current practice. It is based on the key to persistence being a more defined process of conferring and supporting legitimacy, making every effort to ensure that each apprentice starts their journey in the right manner,

especially if they are a non-traditional learner. The non-participation of managers described by learners suggests that a transactional relationship exists between the University and their employer customers, as depicted in figures 11 and 24. Academics such as Rowe et al. (2016) and Mulkeen et al. (2019) have conducted studies which provide valuable insight into the challenges of managing degree apprenticeships and employer concerns. It was clear from these studies that employers need help from universities to change the relationship from transactional to one of collaboration, based on a shared approach to creating an environment that supports learning; a plea that was echoed from the employer participants in this study. The foundation and guiding principles for a proposed new approach would be concretised in a strategic partnership agreement. Lester (2020) suggests this approach as a means to achieve the most effective and sustainable programmes of study. It would involve developing mutually shared objectives, (Rowe et al., 2017), that create the systems and culture to support legitimate peripheral participation, ensuring that learner/employees are supported to achieve their apprenticeship and employers receive a tangible return on their financial investment in training. This approach maintains the employer's power to confer legitimacy, but places the University in control of the learning programme; something that would be welcomed by the employers in this study.

7.3 The relationships and interrelationships affecting legitimate peripheral participation

Regardless of what is written down in a strategic partnership agreement, successful collaboration is dependent on effective relationships and interrelationships within the community of practice, predominantly between members of staff from both organisations, but also between staff and learners. These relationships can be formal, being within the control of the employer and university, or informal so cannot be managed, but can be influenced. Figure 27 presents an overview of these relationships, which directly affect a learner's experience. The two roles critical to success or failure are those of the line manager and the workplace mentor.

Figure 27: The interrelationships involved in a CMDA community of management and academic practice



7.4 The line manager

The system described by the model begins with the line manager, recognising that they are the most powerful agent within the community of practice, as they have the power to confer legitimacy and enhance or diminish the learning experience of an apprentice. Based on the findings, it seems possible that many managers are unaware of how apprenticeships are structured and of their own responsibility to the learner (and to the organisation). It is crucial they are provided with information about the CMDA programme and fully informed of their responsibility and commitment before recruiting candidates begins, especially those managers with no previous experience of apprenticeship.

Lave and Wenger (1991) state that for an apprentice to become a full member of a community of practice, access to a wide range of ongoing activity and opportunities for participation are needed. They describe the manager's role as being the locus of authority, in other words as a facilitator of this activity, stating that "mastery resides not in the master, but in the organisation of the community of practice of which the master is part" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 94). Most line managers in this study were described by their apprentice employee as being supportive, indicating that the relationship was good, but absent as they did not play an active role. In these cases, the learning experience was diminished due to the manager being unaware of their responsibilities to their apprentice, rather than being obstructive or deliberately unsupportive. The manager's input should be weighted towards planning that involves creating legitimacy, prior to an apprentice beginning their programme of study. Thereafter most of their responsibility is overseeing, checking and taking remedial action to support an apprentice when necessary. A key decision for a line manager is selecting the most appropriate method of learning that suits the employee's

learning style and achieves their stated professional development objective, but it must also be a choice that the department can accommodate. Options available include part time study, distance learning and apprenticeship; all should be considered and set against the operational imperative of maintaining continuity of service delivery.

7.5 The recruitment process

Good relationships exist between the University's business engagement team and each employer's HR and training team. Within each organisation, the HR and training team acts as a conduit between the university and operational line managers during the recruitment stage, but given the comments from participants in this study, this is a weakness in the system. Managers appear to be unaware of their role and responsibility, or non-compliant with organisational policy. The problem is exacerbated by the small number of staff in central HR and training teams that deal with apprenticeships, relative to the number of employees in large complex organisations. This means that communication is often handled by junior members of staff, who are not knowledgeable or experienced enough to provide specialist information about the content and structure of the learning programme, or the importance of the managers role and responsibilities to their apprentice(s) throughout their learning journey. The outcome is line managers approving applications for apprenticeships without understanding the importance of recognising their member of staff's new learner identity. It is also a problem for the University, as if control of the learning programme is lost at this stage, the apprentice's chance of completion is at risk.

Improving communication would be achieved by the University's business engagement team meeting prospective line managers, where possible with the employers HR and training team, prior to the start of the recruitment process. In this way, organisational policy could be presented and the apprenticeship system of professional development explained, with particular emphasis on the line managers role. This study found that this approach would be welcomed by the senior HR and training managers. Regarding timing, there are defined start dates for CMDA open groups each year, being September and January, with closing dates for applications several weeks prior. This enables recruitment periods, including pre-briefing and consultation with line managers, to be incorporated into the employers HR and training department annual development calendar before apprenticeship opportunities are promoted and those interested provided with information, advice and guidance. This approach would give line managers time to reflect on whether they are able to accommodate the

apprenticeship model within their team and be able to play an active part in supporting an apprentice during their programme of study.

7.6 Initial assessment

When the employer has conferred legitimacy on their employee using their own recruitment process, the University firstly assesses whether the CMDA is the appropriate learning programme that suits the candidates needs and interests (Lester, 2020; Tinto, 2017). In this study some participants with low level academic achievement were found to have joined the CMDA primarily to achieve a degree, rather than using the qualification for its purpose, which is to develop an understanding of the theory and practice of business management. In cases like this, candidates, especially from public sector organisations, were found to struggle with the broad-based nature of a curriculum, which includes subjects such as marketing or finance that prepares individuals for senior management roles. For these employees, the CMDA might not be a suitable qualification and they should be referred back to their manager. It then needs to be established if a candidate requires any academic support and if so, at what level. The processes that create an early warning system to identify those learners requiring scaffolding for the first year currently exist, but changes to how this information is used and acted upon would be needed. The profile of apprenticeship learners being predominantly non-traditional, with many having particular academic support needs should be recognised, evidenced by the extent of the ongoing academic problems described by many participants. Learning support should not be allocated using the same formula as for undergraduates, it should be proactively allocated based on each individual's academic assessment, rather than be left to the learner coach or personal tutor, which is current practice. This proposed change would inevitably lead to increased tutorial support being needed, resulting in an increased cost of delivery, but should be set against an increased income target that reflects the University's ambition to improve persistence. For some employers, the impact on productivity by investing in work place mentors would need to be justified. Employers that participated in the study stated that they plan to establish a mentor programme and would welcome help with training and working more closely with the University. This finding is supported by other studies; however, it cannot be assumed that all employers would feel the same.

7.7 Pre-induction and induction

Induction as an introduction to the learning programme and to the University was felt by some participants to need more emphasis on academic practice such as structuring assignments and referencing. Recognising and accepting the course leaders comment that not all learners need this additional support and that learners progress differently, no change is needed to induction and there is no requirement for a 'whole group' pre-induction. There is however a place for an on-line option. This is a viable cost and time effective solution to introduce any learner to academic practice, which could increase confidence prior to the start of the programme. This option should be made available to all, even those with previous higher education experience, as some participants mentioned that a refresher would have been useful. Given the time that some have to wait between enrolling and starting the programme, this could also be an effective way to keep learners 'warm' and engaged prior to starting. The course leader for cyber apprenticeships at the University found this to be the case for his apprentices. As widening participation is an aim for degree apprenticeships and a feature of CMDA recruitment, recognised by the Chartered Management Institute (2020b), it is suggested that the CMI are approached to develop a range of on-line pre-induction modules together with university partners. Pre-induction modules could be made available via the CMI website as this would circumvent the problem of learners being unable to access the University's on-line systems until they have been fully enrolled. Collaboration like this is promoted by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (2013), that call for universities, awarding bodies and employers to work together in the development and delivery of degree apprenticeships. There is an associated consideration when planning pre-enrolment processes and induction, which is the cut off time for applications. There is little point in developing systems and support to scaffold learners if time is not factored in to enable adequate time for processing and assessment to take place in good time before induction.

7.8 Mentors and peer mentors

The workplace mentor is a pivotal role (Lester, 2020; Roberts et al., 2019), occupying a unique position, as mentors interact with the learner and the course team. Although the support provided by peers was a strong theme in the literature and mentioned by participants as an essential part of the support ecosystem, mentors were largely absent and misunderstood as a means of support.

Establishing peer and mentor support should be viewed as part of the legitimacy process and is depicted as such in the model. The partnership agreement would require mentors to be appointed by the employer, but trained by the University to further strengthen links and cooperation between the two organisations (Mulkeen et al., 2019; Roberts et al., 2019; Rowe et al., 2017). Regardless of whether these members of staff had previous mentor experience, they would be required to join the mentor training programme at the business school in advance of the start of the CMDA programme. The aim of these sessions would be to meet the course team and familiarise mentors with the learning programme to enable them to align participation and practice with the curriculum. Given the importance of the learning time allowance to a successful learning experience and learner wellbeing, mentors would also be asked to ensure that the off the job learning allowance was being provided, as well as being used effectively.

The mentor/university relationship is mutually beneficial. The mentor can be a source of industry intelligence for the course leader that enables the CMDA programme to be maintained and developed over time. Without this input, ideally from a range of mentors across different sectors, the opportunity to evolve the programme, adapting to new thinking and technologies, might not be fully exploited and the programme's relevance fades over time. Course leaders could facilitate this by arranging group meetings with mentors from specific industry groups such as the NHS, general meetings with mentors representing a range of sectors, or hold one to one meetings if that is more suitable when time or confidentiality is an issue. Conversely and reciprocally, the mentor could use information gained from the course team to arrange work related projects for apprentices.

Roberts et al. (2019) considers how to assess the value of mentoring. They discount quantitative measurement given the nature of the activity and agree with (Clutterbuck, 2005) that any form of measurable output that might form targets is not compatible in a mentee-focused relationship. Therefore, they feel that measurement based on the mentees progress, including general wellbeing, progress and learner persistence are the most appropriate, concluding by referring to a study by Hooley (2016), which found evidence that learner engagement and attainment was positively affected by employer mentoring.

To complement workplace mentors, especially if there is a delay in appointing or finding a suitable candidate, peer mentor volunteers drawn from recently graduating learners could be used to support new (especially non-traditional) learners for the first two modules. As most

dropout occurs during the first six months, this support could play a significant role in persistence and bridge the gap between the start of the programme and class peer groups forming. Limiting the peer mentors to two modules should be sufficient, but also would not place undue pressure on these alumni as they have other work-related responsibilities to maintain.

7.9 Access to time and learning experiences

Underpinning the approach presented in the model is the absolute need for the learning time allowance as a minimum to be respected. But it is not enough for managers simply to provide access to time, they should also provide access to experiences that contribute toward their apprentices developing as managers and learners. None of the apprentices involved in this study were taking full advantage of the socio-cultural learning experience that an apprenticeship should offer, as they were focused on completing the course assignments. Whilst the participants commented that they could apply what is being learnt in their roles, the time they were spending outside the classroom was writing assignments, not gaining greater insight into management practice to augment their learning, thereby improving their leadership potential. Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 95) describe apprenticeship learning as "crucially involving participation, of both absorbing and being absorbed in the culture of practice." If access to the full learning time allowance was allocated and line managers (and mentors) ensured that this time was being used productively, to expand their apprentice's knowledge, the value of a CMDA could be greatly enhanced. The University could assist with some experiences that could be used as part of the learning time allowance. For example, access to the workshops organised by the Growth Hub could be offered along with webinars from the University's partner organisations, such as C2S business networking, or the Bank of England. As mentioned, mentors would be asked to oversee off the job learning, but compliance should also be monitored in other ways, for example via a learning experiences log. Given the strength of feeling from learner participants in this study, there is little doubt that if learners were provided with the means to voice their concerns, they would be happy to do so. For example, if they were not receiving the support they were expecting, or that others in the group were receiving, be that the time allowance or other experiences.

7.10 A competitive advantage

The system defined by the model together with the associated best practice guidelines would create a new approach to the CMDA, by providing a learning programme that exploits the principles of socio-cultural learning theory to promote learner persistence. Given the comments from employers in this and other studies of apprenticeship learning, it could also provide a competitive advantage in a crowded marketplace of apprenticeship providers, as it provides support to HR and training teams and line managers. A strategic partnership agreement with shared objectives would provide the foundation of a relationship that would create a power dynamic and place the University in control of the CMDA programme. This would place it in a position of strength where it could use the agreement to audit the system and call out bad practice, using the outcome for continual improvement and as evidence in OFSTED inspections.

CHAPTER 8: EXTERNAL INFLUENCES AFFECTING THE FUTURE OF DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS

8.1 The future of the apprenticeship levy

The 2019 CBI publication, entitled Learning on the Job: Improving the Apprenticeship Levy, found that 26% of businesses were not using their apprenticeship levy, deciding to treat it as a tax (CBI, 2019). Research from City and Guilds found that use of the levy was low, with employers only spending an average of 55.5% of their apprenticeship levy funding, with only 4% having used their full levy funding in the past five years. Also, 96% of UK businesses would like to see a change in how the levy is used (City and Guilds, 2023). Changing the rules governing use of the apprenticeship levy is supported by the CBI who are lobbying for greater flexibility in how levy funds can be used to help employers that are facing skills shortages. They are calling on the government to evolve the apprenticeship levy into what they call a more flexible skills challenge fund. This would allow employers to spend their funds on any training that is part of a regulated qualification, or accredited training course. They found that this move would increase the investment in training of levy paying employers by 30% (CBI, 2019).

Apprenticeships are not the right solution for some individuals, or some work environments, for example where line managers are not able to offset the workload left by an apprentice as they take their 20%. Changes such as those recommended by the CBI, supported by the Policy Exchange think tank (Mansfield & Hirst, 2023), would position apprenticeships as one of a number of choices available to employers to develop skills funded by the levy, rather than apprenticeships being the only option. This might slow down the numbers of apprenticeship starts, but could have a positive effect on retention and success rates.

8.2 The quality conundrum

This research found that both the University and the employer share responsibility for learners that do not persist. This raises a question about who should bear responsibility for programme quality, including the learner experience and learner persistence by those external agencies responsible for inspecting the quality of apprenticeship programmes. Currently, the focus of external inspection is on the provider, but a university's power to control the quality of delivery in the workplace is limited. If apprenticeship provision is judged to be inadequate the university may face sanctions, but the same level of scrutiny (or sanction) does not apply

to employers, unless they are an employer provider. Furthermore, conversations with learners and senior managers highlighted a lack of management accountability when learners withdrew from their programme of study (for work related reasons), even though organisational resources in terms of time and funds had been invested, maybe at the expense of others.

The governments preferred position, as detailed in the apprenticeship reforms was to position employers as customers (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2013). This seems appropriate as in most cases employers buy in apprenticeship education, as they would any other specialist service that was not their core business. As the inspection process is unlikely to change, the quality conundrum can only be solved through the quality of delivery and the learner experience being included within a voluntary strategic partnership agreement. This emphasises the importance of the University leading discussions with their large employers prior to starting recruitment; to build strong foundations and establishing ways that both organisations can share responsibility for the overall quality of provision and learner outcomes.

8.3 Improving performance

A national focus on improving apprenticeship performance, including retention, is being led by the Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education (appendix B). This study has revealed that without employers and universities making changes to current practice that would improve the learner experience, arbitrarily setting targets would serve no purpose.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: CMDA starters and leavers (all years 2018 – 2022)

CMDA starters and leavers - all years

Starts/leavers	Starts	leavers	completers	IoS	on programme	
	58	21	5	4	28	
Leaver profile	**0-3 months**	**4-6 months**	**7-11 months**	**end of year 1**	**end of year 2**	**Total**
	7	2	7	5	0	21
	33%	10%	33%	24%		

Source: University of Gloucestershire MIS system

Appendix B: The minister for skills, apprenticeships and higher education's letter to university and college leaders

The Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP

Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education

Sanctuary Buildings 20 Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT

tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/contactus/dfe

Dear apprenticeship colleagues

Today my department has published data on the number of achievements on the apprenticeship programme in the first 6 months of the 2022 to 2023 academic year and the full-year apprenticeship achievement rates for the 2021 to 2022 academic year. I am pleased to see that in the first six months of 2022 to 2023, 22% more apprentices have achieved occupational competence compared to the same period last year.

Behind these numbers are individuals, young people just starting out in their professional lives, as well as those wishing to upskill or change career – people from all backgrounds, who you have helped to climb the ladder of opportunity to get fulfilling, career-building jobs. I want to thank you all for the brilliant work you're doing as further education and training providers, employers, assessment organisations or others supporting the programme.

I also know that there is much more for us to do collectively to raise the annual apprenticeship achievement rate, currently standing at 51% for apprenticeship standards. While not all the reasons for non-achievement are within the gift of providers or employers, I know that, like me, you want to see this figure improve. Supported by the dedication and expertise of our further education and skills sector, we all want to see the quality of apprenticeships continue to improve for apprentices of all backgrounds, to drive social justice and support the economy. Our ambition of reaching a 67% achievement rate for apprenticeship standards by 2024 to 2025 remains a cornerstone of this improvement drive.

We will now take further action to support you to improve achievements:

- Today my department publishes, for the first time, the aggregate results of our **apprentice feedback** survey, which shows overwhelmingly that apprentices really appreciate their training provider. However, it also highlights areas for improvement. We're also publishing the results of our new **exit feedback survey** which is sent to learners who withdraw from the programme. Using and improving the data available on achievements will be key to our success. You can find out more in our report on apprenticeship achievements.

Appendix C: Significant characteristics of the CMDA population

The source of all the information presented below was the University of Gloucestershire MIS system in July 2023.

Leaver profile - time

Leaver profile	0-3 months	4-6 months	7-11 months	end of year 1	end of year 2	Total
Number of learners	7	2	7	3	0	19
%	37%	11%	37%	16%		100%

Qualification level and drop out

Qualification level	% of learners	Of those that dropped out
Below level 3	41%	50%
A level	6%	16%
Level 4/5	37%	13%
Level 6/7	16%	21%

Age profile

Age	% of population	Age profile of those that dropped out
21-25	16%	27%
26-29	29%	27%
30+	55%	45%

Appendix D: Participant information sheet

AN INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT TO UNDERSTAND DEGREE APPRENTICESHIP LEARNER MOTIVATION

Research project title: Communities of Practice and Apprentice Motivation: An Interpretivist Exploration of Situated Learning and its Effect on Learner Persistence

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Below you will find some questions and answers that you might find helpful. Please take time to read the information and discuss it with others if you wish. Contact Peter White if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information, his contact details are at the bottom of this document.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to explore the motivation of CMDA learners over the duration of their apprenticeship. This includes time spent at the University and in the workplace. The outcomes from this study will inform the future development of business management degree apprenticeship programmes. A written thesis will be produced at the end of the project as part of a Doctorate in Business Administration programme (DBA).

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen to participate as you are, or have been, a Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship learner, an employer, or member of staff at the University of Gloucestershire.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect the standard of care you receive in any way if you are a learner at the University.

What will happen if I agree to take part?

If you decide to take part Peter White will invite you to attend an interview (max 40 minutes), during which there will be a short introduction about the aims of the project, followed by an open discussion in which you will be invited to give your views on your experience. Your identity will not be revealed and none of the participants involved in this project will be identifiable in the final report.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no disadvantages or risks foreseen in taking part in the study.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Your experience could be influential in understanding learner motivation. You will be able to provide invaluable feedback which might improve the learner experience and inform degree apprenticeship providers nationally and internationally, as well as locally for the University of Gloucestershire programme team.

What if you have any questions?

If you wish to clarify any aspect of the study, please contact the postgraduate lead:

Dr Douglas Yourston
Postgraduate Research Degrees Lead
Gloucestershire Business School
University of Gloucestershire
Oxstalls campus
Longlevens GL2 9HW
[redacted]

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

All information which is collected about you during the course of the interview will be kept strictly confidential, only the researcher will have access to the information. Participants should note that data collected from this project may be retained and published in an anonymised form. By agreeing to participate in this project, you are consenting to the retention and publication of data.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results will be written up into a thesis to inform and enhance learner experience and provider practice. Individuals who participate will not be identified in any subsequent report or publication.

Who is organising the research?

Peter White from the University's Business School will be organising and carrying out the study as part of a DBA research project.

Who may I contact for further information?

If you would like more information about the research before you decide whether or not you would be willing to take part, please contact: Peter White. [redacted] or [redacted]

If you are happy with the nature of the research and would like to take part, please sign the consent form below and return it to Peter White (the researcher).

CONSENT FORM

I understand that while the information gathered during this study may be used for research purposes, I will not be identified in any published report(s). I am satisfied that anonymity and confidentiality will therefore be assured at all times.

I understand that I may withdraw from the research project before 31st August 2023.

I understand that data from the interview will be stored in a secure place. No paper records will be produced; all information will be stored digitally and destroyed once the research has been completed.

I understand that I may contact the researcher using the contact details above, if I require further information about the research.

I understand that this research is being carried out in accordance with the University of Gloucestershire's principles and procedures guidance, detailed in the publication: Research Ethics: A Handbook of Principles and Procedures, which can be accessed using the link below.
https://www.glos.ac.uk/research/research-ethics/

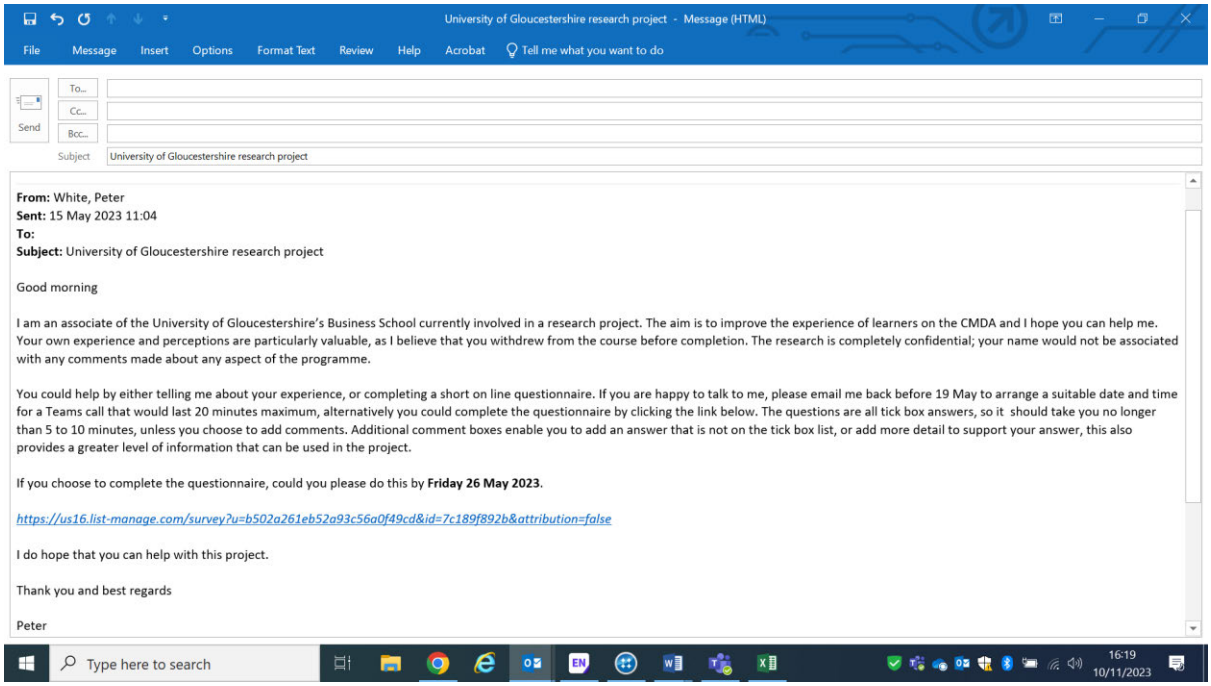
The nature and purpose of the research has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.

Signed …… (Research participant)

Print name ……..**Date** …….

Thank you for your interest in this research.

Appendix E: Email to learner leavers



University of Gloucestershire research project - Message (HTML)

File Message Insert Options Format Text Review Help Acrobat Tell me what you want to do

Send To... Cc... Bcc... Subject: University of Gloucestershire research project

From: White, Peter
Sent: 15 May 2023 11:04
To:
Subject: University of Gloucestershire research project

Good morning

I am an associate of the University of Gloucestershire's Business School currently involved in a research project. The aim is to improve the experience of learners on the CMDA and I hope you can help me. Your own experience and perceptions are particularly valuable, as I believe that you withdrew from the course before completion. The research is completely confidential; your name would not be associated with any comments made about any aspect of the programme.

You could help by either telling me about your experience, or completing a short on line questionnaire. If you are happy to talk to me, please email me back before 19 May to arrange a suitable date and time for a Teams call that would last 20 minutes maximum, alternatively you could complete the questionnaire by clicking the link below. The questions are all tick box answers, so it should take you no longer than 5 to 10 minutes, unless you choose to add comments. Additional comment boxes enable you to add an answer that is not on the tick box list, or add more detail to support your answer, this also provides a greater level of information that can be used in the project.

If you choose to complete the questionnaire, could you please do this by **Friday 26 May 2023**.

https://us16.list-manage.com/survey?u=b502a261eb52a93c56a0f49cd&id=7c189f892b&attribution=false

I do hope that you can help with this project.

Thank you and best regards

Peter

Type here to search 16:19 10/11/2023

Appendix F: learner leaver questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research survey. The purpose is to better understand what leads learners to persist in degree apprenticeship programmes, or leave. The aim is to use this information to improve the design and delivery of the CMDA apprenticeship. When completing the questionnaire, you can simply click on the most appropriate answer in response to a question. Additional comments or thoughts would be very welcome, which you can add using the free text boxes. **Your identity and your answers will be treated as confidential.**

1. Age group

18-20
21-24
25-29
30-34
35-39
40-44
45-49
50-54
55-59
60-64
64-69

2. Do you work in:

The public sector
Education
The private sector

3. Please indicate your highest level of qualification?

Level 1 – e.g. NVQ
Level 2 – e.g. GCSEs
Level 3 - e.g. A Levels/NVQ/B.Tec/Diploma
Level 4 - e.g. NVQ/HNC/Professional Diploma
Level 5 - e.g. HND/Professional Diploma
Level 6 – Degree
Level 7 – Masters

Additional comments:

4. Was it your own decision to join the CMDA?

Yes

No

Additional comments:

5. What was your top motivating factor or factors for starting the CMDA?

(If more than one factor, please rank them in order of priority 1 to 4).

Gaining a degree	1	2	3	4
Improving your future career prospects	1	2	3	4
A free degree and time allowed by employer to do it.	1	2	3	4
Other(s). Please state and rate i.e. 1, 2 or 3:				

6. Did you receive enough information about the CMDA to be able to make a good decision about joining the programme?

Yes

No

Additional comments:

7. What were your reasons for withdrawing from the CMDA? Please indicate the main reason and any other contributing reason(s).

	Main reason	Other reason(s)
Personal reasons, not course related		
Changed employer.		
A change of role within the same organisation.		

Problems understanding academic practice, such as referencing, critical analysis and expressing yourself academically?		
Could not balance work and study.		
Unsupportive manager.		
A change of manager.		
Not given the 20% time for learning.		
Could not relate the course to your work.		
Unsupportive university tutors.		
Poor teaching		
Other reason (please provide details below)		

8. Do you/did you have a supportive manager?

Yes

No

Additional comments:

9. Did your manager understand what was expected of you on the CMDA?

Yes

No

Additional comments:

10. Were you given 20% of your working time for 'off the job learning' to allow you to gain/improve relevant experience, to research and to complete assignments?

Yes

No

Just the time to attend the taught sessions

Additional comments:

If YES, was your workload reduced to accommodate the 20%

Yes

No

Additional comments:

If NO, was it up to you to manage the 20% yourself alongside your workload?

Yes

No

Additional comments:

If NO, did you mostly complete the course work in your own time?

Yes

No

Additional comments:

11. Did you have a workplace mentor provided by your employer?

Yes

No

Additional comments:

12. Did you attend the induction?

Yes

No

Additional comments:

If YES, did you find the induction helpful?

Yes

No

Additional comments:

13. Do you feel that the University engaged sufficiently with your manager to explain the course content and what would be expected of you?

Yes

No

Additional comments:

If NO, would it have helped you if the university had done this?

Yes

No

Additional comments:

14. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey, your support is appreciated. All information will be kept strictly confidential, only the researcher will have access to such information. Individuals who participate will not be identified in any subsequent report or publication.