Developing and improving on the training methods used to technically upskill a multi-regional technical account management team at a multi-national IT company

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on the implementation of a new learning program within a large technology firm utilizing adult education theory. Existing learning approaches have been very traditional within the organisation and focus on delivering material rather than meeting the needs of the learner. The academic research puts the emphasis on basing the learning on the requirements of the learner however examples of implementations are limited.

The research took the form of an action research structure through the implementation of the program, followed by 5 qualitative interviews to analyse the impact of the program. The program was aimed at a trans-regional technical account management within the organisation and the interviews were carried out with 5 technical account managers who had been through the new program.

The research found that the more the learning program related the learning activities to the role of the learner, the more the learners engaged with the program and were happy with the program. It also found that some learners still like to use traditional learning methods, but preferred when they were blended with the new learning methods.

It was also found that the assessment style was very important to the success of the program. By making the assessment a tool to aid in the learning and basing it in a job related scenario, the learner felt more at ease during the evaluation and reduced the fear associated with failure.

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My family: Catherine, John, Kevin and Dean. I wouldn't be the person I am today without you all. The Dunne family for their kindness and support.

Finally, this research is dedicated to my fiancée Sibéal for putting up with me throughout the last two years, and for accompanying me on this journey.

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ABBREVIATIONS

TAM: Technical Account Manager

Throughout this Dissertation, TAM will refer to the role of the Technical Account Managers who are the subject of this research. The Technical Account Manager role is an industry recognised role with the responsibility of being a single point of contact between an organisation and their customer for their post sales technical needs.

DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for the assessment of the programme of study leading to the award of Masters in Management is entirely my own work. Any works within have not been taken from the works of others and to the extent that any such work inspired from others has been acknowledged and correctly referenced within the body and text of my work.

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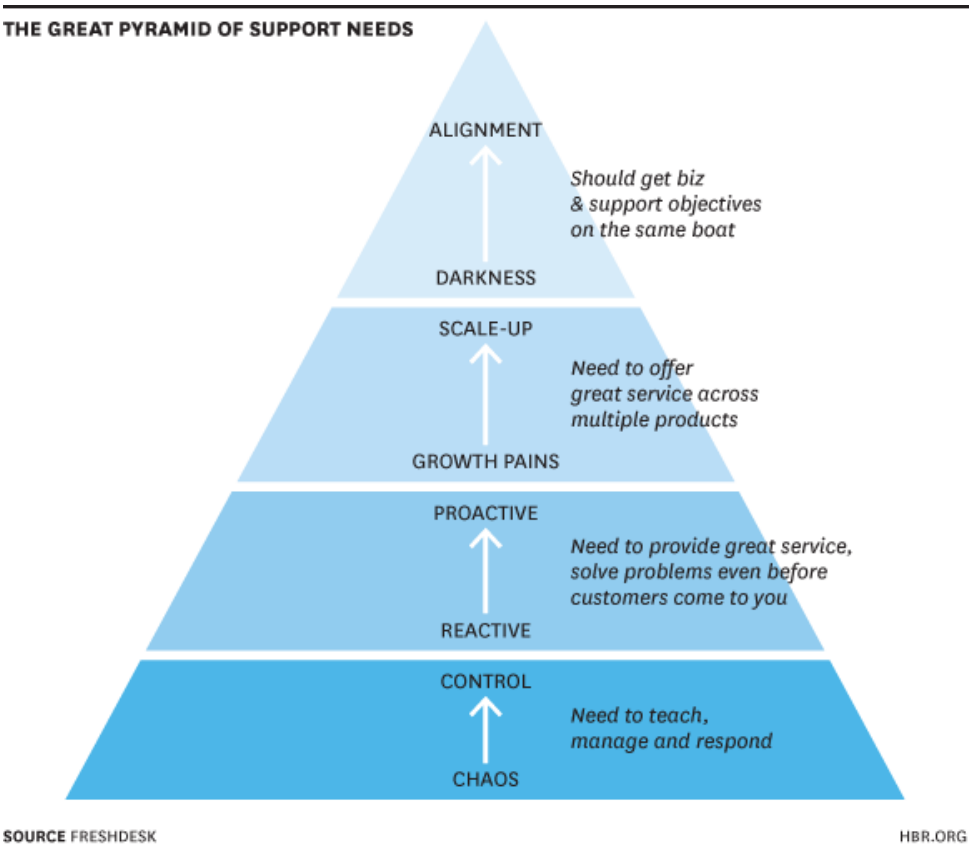
Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Opening Remarks

The IT industry is constantly changing. PC shipments have grown steadily year on year, however a recent trend sees a downturn in PC shipments over the last four years (Forbes, 2015, Statista 2014). The organisation at the heart of this research has its roots in the sale of PCs but has expanded into the server, storage, networking and most recently, the IT services markets. Despite the downturn in PC shipments, global IT spend has continued to grow and Gartner (2015) expects that trend to continue through the coming year.

Lele and Karmarkar (1983) discussed the importance of after sale support, and the most successful businesses have a clear support strategy which views support as a form of marketing. The organisation at the heart of this research, have placed after sales support at the heart of their offering. After sales support is seen as a means to retain and grow business relationships and is in line with the writings of Cohen, Agrawal and Agrawal (2006) who highlighted the revenue and profit gained from after-sales services.

Bhaskaran (2013) applied Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the extended works of Alderfer's ERG model (1972) to come up with the Great Pyramid of Support Needs to highlight the importance of being proactive and aligning the internal support teams with the internal business needs. At the base of the pyramid, the need to teach, manage and respond to customer issues is managed by the front line technical support teams in the organisation. As the business matured and support needs expanded, the Technical Account Management team was created to bring control to chaotic high severity issues for business customers, whose issues might span products and support teams. At this stage in the evolution of the TAM team, technical expertise was a requirement of the role to aid in the resolution of highly technical issues in a timely manner.



The next phase of the pyramid also highlights how the TAM team evolved. As customers' needs evolved, the organisation expanded the role of a TAM and rebranded the team as the Service Delivery Management team. They were now responsible for co-ordinating resources and customer relations through escalations and were now also required to build relationships with key customers and ensure the smooth delivery of IT services from point of sale to these customers. During this phase, there was a strong emphasis on building relationships and not on the development and use of technical skills. A technical skillset was no longer required to apply for the role and through natural attrition and a failure to update and maintain the technical knowledge, this skillset was slowly lost to the team.

The highest level in the pyramid sees a business aiming to "Exceed Expectations" with their customer support, through alignment of the customers support needs and the customers' business needs. The organisation at the centre of this research has recently engaged in a process

of aligning a Technical Account Manager to every customer who purchases the latest support offering. The new role of the TAM will be to maintain customer relationships by fully understanding the customers' business and technical needs. Through this understanding, the TAM could offer technical solutions to business needs based on the customers current IT setup, they could help identify and resolve problems with the IT design as well as recommend pro-active preventative measures to optimize and maintain the customers IT environment.

1.2 Research Grounding

The Technical Account Management team (TAM) is a multi-regional team of approximately 470 people, throughout the EMEA, APJ and ABU regions. Historically the value of their role was measured through customer satisfaction surveys and face to face meetings between these customers and the senior management teams. Through these surveys and face to face meetings customers regularly praised the companies handling of escalations and the technical support teams with results of over 95% customer satisfaction being returned, however the feedback also requested help in preventing these escalations and support issues from happening in the first place. As has been seen with the customer satisfaction results, the customer expectations were being exceeded based on the support contract offered, however now the customer expectations were shifting.

The new goal is to apply the technical support model to the customers' business needs and align internal resources to external customer needs. When the support structure was analysed with the customers' business needs in mind, the technical support desk, the TAM team and the company operated under a reactive model rather than a pro-active model. There was a customer need and desire to move up this pyramid of support needs and the company decided to adapt to those needs through the introduction of a new higher level of support warranty. This new support warranty would entitle the customer to an aligned TAM who would be responsible for getting to know the customers' business and their IT environment. Through this business relationship the company could be more pro-active to the customer support needs and align resources and support with the customers' business needs. If a new project was being designed by the customer, the TAM team could engage with a technical conversation with the customer on how the needs of that project could be met with the IT infrastructure in place, or bring in the sales team to discuss the potential for expanding the customers IT environment to meet the needs.

An analysis of support escalations showed that poor system maintenance or inaccurate configurations were also key drivers of escalations, so another branch of this new warranty was regular reporting of the customers IT infrastructure and the aligned TAM would review these reports, then plan, organise and implement the required changes to the customers environment through the use of internal and customer resources.

These new responsibilities required the TAM team to have a very strong technical skillset which was not previously required under the Service Delivery Manager role. The need of the business and the TAM team now is to upskill all 470 senior employees throughout the three regions, and also because the new warranty offering is already being sold, this must be done while minimizing the impact to the customer by upskilling the TAM team in as quickly as possible while minimizing the impact on their day to day activities.

Historically there has been no training developed for the TAM teams in their initial deployment or during their capacity as Service Delivery Managers. This is owing to the fact that the first TAM team was hired from the technical support staff and were already highly technical, then during the SDM phase the emphasis was on customer relationships rather than technical knowledge. Existing technical support training is considered to be too technical for the needs of the new TAM responsibilities and is aimed at too high a level for present skillset of the TAMs. Sales training is also considered to be unsuitable for the TAM teams as its content is considered to be too focused on marketing of products and is not technical enough. The goal of this research is to develop and implement the technical training program and evaluate the progress of the participants.

1.3 Brief Overview of Findings

Education and development of staff is given high priority within the target organisation, however the internal training methods are more in line with traditional classroom training followed by online multiple choice evaluations. These training classes are restricted to the products sold by the company with all other training and certification outsourced. This research developed a new internal training program to upskill and evaluate the existing TAM team using a more modern method of training and evaluation.

This research found that by implementing some of the concepts outlined in the andragogy theory developed by Knowles (1973), that greater engagement was seen from the students. This was especially true when it came to developing learning activities which were clearly directly related to the role of the TAM and their interaction with their customers. The research did also find that not all of the theory applied to all of the students with some students preferring more traditional methods blended with the job related activities.

The assessment at the end of the course was extremely important to the acceptance of the program and when it came to developing the assessment Stiggins (2005) “Assessment FOR Learning” informed the design. By implementing a formative style of assessment in place of a summative, the evaluation performed a dual function. It could confirm the understanding and assimilation of the knowledge but also it could act as a tool for improved learning, so that even unsuccessful candidates could see the result in a positive light.

1.4 Research Title

The title of this Dissertation is “Developing and improving on the training methods used to technically upskill a multi-regional technical account management team at a multi-national IT company”

1.5 Research Aim

The Aim of this research is to challenge the existing methods of training employed by the organisation and to upskill the existing Technical Account Management teams to address the changing needs of their role. The researchers aim is also to make these changes within the context of adult education theory.

1.6 Objectives

The research objectives for this study are to:

1. Create a program to technically upskill the existing multi-regional Technical Account Management team.
2. Identify how to evaluate the Technical Account Managers development through the program.
3. Compare the real world implementation to the literature related to adult education theory.

1.7 Dissertation Structure

This Dissertation is comprised of seven chapters.

Chapter one offers an introduction into the proposed research and the context surrounding the project chosen as the basis of this research. This is important as it informs the reader on the role the Technical Account Manager plays within the organisation and the challenges the project is aiming to tackle.

Chapter Two offers an overview of the literature surrounding the topic of adult education. It also aims to address the relevance of engaging in an adult educational model as compared to traditional educational models used in school systems and reused in many organisations.

Chapter Three sets out the researchers' aims and objectives in response to the available literary works regarding adult education.

Chapter Four discusses the methodological approach undertaken by the researcher to explore the aims and objectives stated in Chapter Three. Justifications for the chosen approaches are included, along with details of the data collection, sample and analysis.

Chapter Five will outline the key findings retrieved during project roll out and the data collection process.

Chapter Six will discuss these findings in terms of the literature presented in Chapter Two.

Chapter Seven will see the researcher draw conclusions and make suggestions for areas of future research.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter we will explore the seminal works surrounding the education theory and the current literature covering adult education theory. We will also explore the academic theory behind testing and evaluating as these works have a direct impact and influence on the research at the basis of this paper.

2.2 Pedagogy

The theory of learning dates back to ancient Greek times and the term pedagogy relates to the science of education. Traditionally education is considered the passing of knowledge from adult to child. Even the term pedagogy translates from ancient Greek as “to lead the child”. Children growing up are introduced to education through authority figures, firstly through parental figures and then through an education system. The methods used in traditional adult to child teaching are also used when imparting knowledge in an adult to adult environment. Swanson (1992) tells us that employee effectiveness and efficiency is increased when training is done properly but Knowles (1984) found that training in the workplace typically focused on the needs of the organization rather than the needs of the employee. In the example of this South Dublin IT firm, training has taken the form of pedagogy and is done in a classroom format where information on the latest products and services are imparted to the employees. The knowledge is delivered in the same format regardless of the role of the employee in the organization and they are expected to apply that knowledge to their role. A study done by Raybould (2000) found that as much as 85% of learning is done on the job and this information is typically used as an explanation for this form of training in the workplace. When Merrick Jones (1980) looked back at a training class he ran he realised that he, like other trainers didn’t base his training methods on any particular theory. This backs up Knowles idea that "most teachers of adults have only known how to teach adults as if they were children" and the methods used to train the employees in the South Dublin IT company, despite the advancements in adult education knowledge over the years.

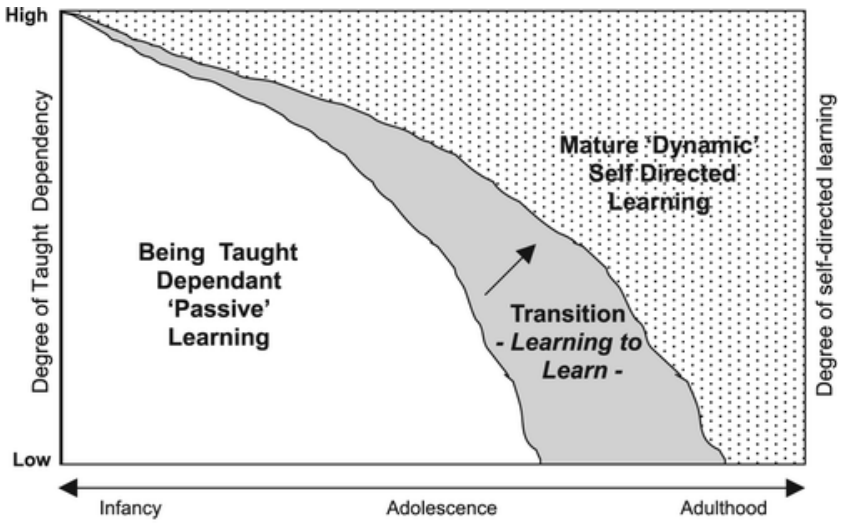
2.3 Andragogy

Pedagogies child focused learning methods have been challenged over the years and the term andragogy has been used to define the theory of educating adults. It was first introduced by a German teacher, Alexander Kapp, in 1833 to describe the teachings of Plato (Nottingham Andragogy Group 1983). The term is today widely associated with Malcom Knowles who introduced the term to the US after being introduced to the term himself by Yugoslavian Dusan Savicevic in 1967 (Knowles, 1984). Like pedagogy, andragogy is derived from Greek and rather than being the leading of children, it is the leading of men. Knowles was working in an era where motivational theorists were changing Tayloristic views on management. He cites theorists such as Hertzberg and McGregor in his 1983 article "Releasing the Energy of Others – Making things Happen" to back up his assumption that trainers should move away from being teachers and imparters of knowledge to facilitators of self-learning. Knowles (1983) compares the teaching of pedagogy to McGregor's (1960) "Theory X" style of management. He further emphasises his point through the applied works of Rosenthal and Jacobson's "Pygmalion in the Classroom" experiment which showed that telling a student they were the best, got the best out of the student, while telling the student they were the worst inevitably led to the student being the worst performer. As a proponent of McGregor's (1960) "Theory Y" style of management, Knowles (1973, 1980, 1984) bases his theory of andragogy on a number of principals and assumptions which are learner focused. He proposed five characteristics from his experiences and observations.

1. Adults are no longer dependent personalities and are now self-directed human beings.
2. Adults accumulate experience as they grow and this experience is a resource which adults can tap into to help with learning
3. As people grow, their desire to learn is more focused towards their role

4. Peoples perspectives change over time and what was once a subject centred approach to learning is now more problem centred
5. As people mature, the motivation to learn is internalised

(Knowles 1984)



Source: Knowles (1990)

From these characteristics, Knowles (1984) developed four principles which should be applied to adult learning.

1. *Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.*
2. *Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for learning activities.*
3. *Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance to their job or personal life.*
4. *Adult learning is problem-centred rather than content-oriented. (Kearsley, 2010)*

While originally considering pedagogy and andragogy as diametrically opposed, Knowles (1984) later considered them to be at two ends of a spectrum where circumstances would dictate where along the spectrum they could be applied. This research aims to look at where along the spectrum is optimal when applied to the teaching of technology skills to senior management who's time is limited. Ingalls (1972) expanded on Knowles work and proposed a seven stage process for applying andragogy with included:

1. **Climate Setting**: Creating the right environment to encourage co-operation and learning
2. **Mutual Planning**: Including the learners in the planning goals
3. **Need Assessment**: Understanding the needs and interests of the students
4. **Formulating Objectives**: Designing a staged process for reaching the agreed goals
5. **Designing Activities**: Development of the activities
6. **Implementation**: Implementing the process with the required resources
7. **Evaluation of Results**: Evaluating the learning experience

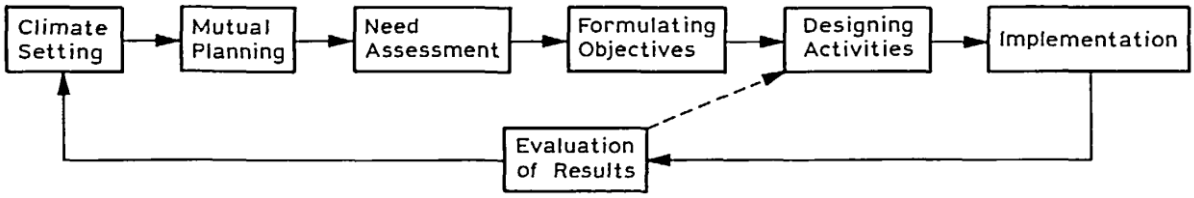


Figure 1: IIngalls, J., A Trainer's Guide to Andragogy

2.4 Application

Since its introduction and popularization in the US, andragogy has been applied in a number of fields. Martin and Woodside (2009) applied it to the tourism/hospitality sector and found that the sector would benefit from its application. They further encouraged managers in the industry to use andragogical methods and submit their learning to the journal for future special issues.

Birzer (2003) applied andragogy to the traditionally behaviourist methods of police training, and in keeping with Knowles idea that andragogy is on a spectrum, he found that andragogy was more suited to some learning activities than others. When reactionary self-defence measures were needed, the behavioural methods utilized by the military were most applicable however with the advent of community policing there is more of a need for critical thinking. In this scenario, by creating job related cases or problems and structured activities in keeping with andragogy, the learners could be seen to benefit, but the trainers should be skilled in problem framing and communication.

When Merrick Jones (1980) reviewed his own teaching methods with andragogy in mind, he came to the conclusion that while he didn't directly apply the principals, they did influence his work. He concluded that all trainers should consider andragogy when developing training, even if they do not follow it rigidly.

There are a number of critics of andragogy. One of the earliest and most notable was Ann Hartree (1984) who challenged the work for being unclear and ambiguous. Elsey and Henschke (2011) note that most of the criticism stems from this ambiguity as there the concepts are abstract and difficult to translate into a "cohesive whole". Further criticism from Hartree (1984) is that the line between child and adult is not distinct and as a result Knowles assumptions are vague. Perhaps the principles could be applied to both adults and children alike. Hanson (1996) questions whether there is evidence of there being a difference between the way an adult learns and a child learns giving the example that "Adults are not necessarily more

experienced because they have lived longer." He goes on to point out that people mature at different rates and in different ways, and while Knowles theory differentiates the learning experience between adult and child, being an adult is not an "all or nothing experience".

Mezirow (1991) expanded on Knowles work and developed another theory known as transformative learning. His theory, like Knowles', is grounded in the idea of the adult as an individual and describes a process through which an adult goes when learning. Similar to Lewin's (1947) Unfreeze, Change, ReFreeze model of change, Mezirow (1991) posited that adults go through a ten stage process from disorientation, to reflection and finally reintegration. The ten stages are

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
3. A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan
8. Provision trying of new roles
9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective

Taylor (1997, 2009) argues that this theory has not been applied in the classroom by adult educators to a sufficient extent. This research proposal will look to integrate the concepts of andragogy and transformative learning and apply them to a practical scenario and examine their results.

2.5 Assessment Theory

Standardized testing does not have its roots in education but actually began in ancient China when the imperial examination was rolled out nationwide as a means of selecting candidates for specific government jobs. These testing systems lasted for many centuries until reforms in the 20th century, brought on by the influence of western cultures and education, saw the end of these tests (DuBois 1964).

In western society, written educational examinations began in the United States in the 1800's following calls for reform to the education system from Horace Mann. Mann occupied the role of Secretary of the Massachusetts State Board of Education from 1837 up until 1848 and is widely credited for his work in promoting the modernization of the United States educational system. The first recorded written examination took place in Massachusetts during this time and (Engelhart 1950). Initially these tests were administered to categorise students and then later they were used to advance students from grade to grade, where previously advancement was made on the basis of a recommendation.

The reliability of these tests were examined by Starch and Elliott in 1912 and they found that as much as students could earn results, the instructors standards had an impact on the results of the student also, by as much as "35 or 40 points" in some cases. Nearly 100 years later, Brimi (2011) conducted a similar experiment on the results of English writing papers and discovered almost identical results, concluding that writing styles are open to opinion and interpretation. McCall (1920) described standardized examinations as the "most important educational measurement" but devised a new type of examination based on students' determination as to whether a statement was true or false. In this way, McCall wanted to standardise the marking system, provide a scientific set of results and reduce the amount of time it takes to correct such examinations.

In the late 60s, Michael Scriven brought to light two forms of assessment styles called formative and summative assessments. The formative assessment is one used during the learning in order to promote the

knowledge or the program, while a summative assessment is one that would take place at the end of a program in order to test what the student had learned. Summative assessment has been by far the most popular over the last few decades, however Stiggins (2005) argues that formative assessments are far more suited to enhancing the learning experience of students. He states that due to the fact that summative assessments only happen once a year, formative assessments have become more popular amongst teachers as a means of increasing the frequency of assessments in order to have an impact on day to day activities. Stiggins does argue for a reform of the formative assessments. Popham (1999) discussed the role standardized test play in the US education system and argued that standardised tests are not a measure of the effectiveness or quality of the education, owing to a multitude or reasons. One of the reasons is that the tests themselves only cover a small percentage of the course material. Due to time constraints a sample is taken of the course material to be covered in order to cover as many topics as possible and therefore do not cover the full knowledge of the student. He goes on to say that there does need to be a form of testing but that the right tools need to be utilized.

Stiggins suggests that these formative assessments be reimagined as “Assessments FOR learning”. This new format would see the assessments take on many different forms and that students should become more involved in understanding the standards they are expected to reach. This method could be conducive to the principals set out by Knowles, where adults should be involved in education and evaluations. A more important aspect of the “Assessment FOR learning” is that the grade is not the focus of the assessment but the teacher should provide clear, descriptive feedback which supplies the student with guidance on how the student might direct their learning, set goals and bridge the gaps in their knowledge.

Scouller (2006) examined the influence the style of evaluation had on the learning of the student. Specifically, she focused on the differences between multiple choice assessments versus essay style assessments. She found that students were more likely to study a topic in more depth owing to the perception that essay style assessments were assessing the student at a

higher level. Consequently, students employed a more shallow form of study when preparing for multiple choice assessments. Having said this, Zeidner (1987) found that students preferred multiple choice questions and Bridgeman and Morgan (1996) found that US high school students who performed well on essays and poorly on multiple choice assessments, did just as well in college as students who performed well on multiple choice assessments but poorly on essay style assessments.

Chapter 3 – Aims and Objectives

3.1 Research Grounding

The context in which this research is set involves a key pillar for the direction the organisation wishes to go. The technical development of the Technical Account Management team is critical to the success of the businesses support services objectives. The literature outlines theoretical perspectives regarding adult learning and argues the inclusion of the learner in the design process, the environment for the learner to make and learn from mistakes, a direct association to their job and for the program to be problem rather than context oriented.

3.2 Research Aims & Objectives

The Aim of this research is to challenge the existing methods of training employed by the organisation and to upskill the existing Technical Account Management teams to address the changing needs of their role. Through the course of the research and in keeping with the andragogy philosophy developed by Knowles, the Technical Account Management team will have an input into the development of the goals and the design of the program. The program of learning will also look to create an environment for the learners to experiment with different job related scenarios and see the consequences of errors in a safe environment. Finally, it will be important for the learning objectives to be put in the context of a customer's business. Time and budget limitations will impact the scope of the project and thus the extent to which the andragogy principals may be applied.

Key milestones in the development of the program will be deciding on a delivery method for disseminating the subject material. With over 470 participants in the program globally, with their own individual time constraints, a suitable method for delivery will need to be designed and implemented. This research will aim to develop a program which is in keeping with the self-learning principals of andragogy, and the educator as a facilitator rather than the traditional and widely used classroom based training currently in the organisation. The role and strategy employed by the facilitators will aim to support the participants through job based activities to engender support and buy in from the learners, and this research will aim to develop and find means of sharing the limited resources of five coaches amongst the multi-regional Technical Account Management team, taking into account the variety of cultures and languages. The research will also aim to evaluate the progress of the learner through the program to ensure the success of the delivery method.

3.3 Additional Comments

This change in direction for the Technical Account Management team will likely encounter resistance, a phenomenon which has been studied at length by many researchers such as Coch and French (1948), Lewin (1947) and Lawrence (1969). During the course of the research, it is expected that those resistances to change will need to be addressed and overcome in order for the program to be successful. The learnings from which will be addressed and utilized should the program be shared amongst the wider organization. This program and research is likely to have knock on effects to the organization as a whole and how learning and development is conducted, should it proceed with a successful roll out and garner full buy in from the participants.

Chapter 4 – Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the methodological approach conducted by the researcher during the research process will be discussed and justification for selecting the methodological approach is included, along with details pertaining to the sample group, interview style, data collection and data analysis. It will also outline the ethical considerations of this research, and finally a discussion will be held regarding the potential limitations through conducting this research.

4.2 Research Philosophy

The researchers' choice of data collection and analysis has been influenced by a number of factors but most heavily by the researchers' role within the organisation at the centre of the research.

French (2009) comments that action research can be applied to many research problems provided the researcher has a reasonable understanding of the problem, and while there is no set model for conducting an action research program, it is still a methodical approach to researching a problem.

4.3 Epistemology

Hannabuss (2007) describes epistemology as being concerned with the evidence we use to verify our knowledge or “how we explain and infer and imply”. There are number of different epistemological approaches, Kvanvig (2003) refers to a traditional form of epistemology known as “justified true belief” in which knowing is described as a belief with a rationale behind it, in a particular context. He expanded this theory to refer to understanding rather than knowledge, as the context could change the basis of the belief.

The correspondence theory states that a theory is true if it matches up with reality. Tarski (1977) is considered to have rehabilitated the theory and refers to it as the common sense idea of truth. In a similar fashion Bryman (2008) debated different epistemological approaches, questioning whether social sciences and natural sciences should be measured in the same way. This researcher’s epistemological philosophy would lean towards the correspondence theory and would believe that an interpretation of truth can be based on what the researcher has witnessed through the delivery of the project.

4.4 Quantitative Research

Quantitative research is very much associated with assessing causality and investigates a relationship between variables (Creswell 2014). They traditionally take the form of surveys or experiments to confirm a hypothesis through scientific measurement. As an organisational requirement, the program at the heart of this study would be subject to an organisationally designed survey. These surveys were designed around the industry recognised format of “Net Promoter Score”. This metric, introduced by Reichheld (2003) aims, categorises customers as promoters, passively satisfied or detractors of your service, and calculates how likely your customers are to recommend your service by subtracting the percentage of detractors from the percentage of promoters. In this way the metric aims to see if your service is likely to garner further customer. Reichheld suggests that a world class score would be greater than 75%. Keiningham et al. (2007) have challenged Reighhelds’ assertions regarding the effectiveness of Net Promoter Score.

As the organisation promotes this metric as a guide to the success or failure of the program, it was felt by this researcher that further surveys could prove counterproductive and that the results of these surveys could act as a guide to the success or failure of changes made during the programs roll out. The surveys would not form the basis of the findings of this research as they have not been designed, collected or validated by the researcher, however the researcher felt they would be remiss to ignore them.

4.5 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research allows for a certain amount of flexibility as questions and procedures may alter and emerge during the research process (Saunders et al 2012: 162-163). It is concerned with the study of participants' meanings and the relationships between them. This research is aimed at gathering feedback from participants on the use of andragogy research in order to inform the creation of a development program. An important aspect of this research is to determine the feelings and viewpoints of the participants on the program to inform future development of the program. Observation and feedback from the participants is a key aspect of both qualitative research, the development of the program and the resulting findings of this paper.

Cresswell (2009) tells us that the use of qualitative research is best suited to understanding the meaning behind a complex situation, and it is up to the researcher to interpret the data to find that meaning through the use of general themes. Considering the nature of this research paper, and the fact that data was collected on the job in a complex working environment, this researcher felt that a qualitative approach was best suited to this paper.

4.6 Interviews

A number of different options for collecting data for the purpose of this research were considered. Kitzinger (1995) tells us that focus groups are suited to the study of attitudes and experiences. This would seem to match up with the objectives of this course, however as the participants of this research paper were based on sites throughout the EMEA and many of whom work from home, this was not a viable option. Interviews were chosen and held with 5 individuals from the TAM community who had completed the program to the level covered by this research paper. It was felt by the researcher that gathering feedback from the participants first hand in a semi-structured interview would yield a deeper understanding of the feelings of the participants towards what they felt was important (Longhurst 2003).

4.7 Action Research

This paper aims to enhance the skills of existing employees as well as developing knowledge through its implementation. The target team consists of approximately 470 employees and is an experienced team whose primary role has been in relationship management. The technical skills of these employees cannot be enhanced through the use of traditional qualitative or quantitative research methods, as these research methods are aimed at enhancing theory only. Coughlan and Coughlan (2002) state that action research is about “taking action and creating knowledge or theory about that action”, so this research took the form of an action research paper. As discussed in the literary review, action research has been carried out using andragogy principals by a number of academics. Coch and French (1948) successfully used action research methods to study the resistance to change with the implementation of technological change, while Jones (1980), Martin & Woodside (2009) and Birzer (2003) applied the andragogy principals to varying other sectors.

Gummesson (2000) outlines ten characteristics of action research which we will discuss in the context of this paper in turn.

1. Action Researchers take action: Schein (1999) outlines two models under which the researcher can undertake action research, the expert model or the process consultation model. The researcher operated under the expert model in this scenario acting as a project developer, coach and evaluator within the scope of the organisation and project. The researcher was part of a cross regional team of five coaches; two in the EMEA region, two in the US region and one in the APJ (Asia, Pacific and Japan) region.
2. Action Research always involves two goals: As part of this research the goals were to both contribute to the organisation by implementing a new program to upskill the Technical Account Managers but also through this process to take learnings from the process which may be applied elsewhere in the overall training

structure within the organisation and also contribute to existing adult education theory.

3. Action Research is interactive: The TAM team is an experienced and diverse team who were the focus of the research. The team had and continue to have a vested interested in the success of the program and their feedback will be critical its success.
4. Action Research aims at developing a holistic understanding: This program was a cross regional program aimed at a number of different cultures and internal organizational structures. Nadler and Tushman (1980) developed the congruence model as a systematic way of looking at the root causes to an organizations performance. The program needed to adapt at regular intervals and was reviewed under the four headings of this model (Work, Culture, Structure and People).
5. Action Research is fundamentally about change: Coughlan and Coghlan (2002) credit Kurt Lewin with the introduction of action research in the mid-1940s and Lewin also developed the force field analysis for change. The goal of this research, in line with Lewins' research, was to "unfreeze" the current thinking of the TAM teams and help them engage with the new program, "change" their current technical knowledge, and "refreeze" with the new technological knowledge within the team. Kanter et al (1992) and Dawson (1994) are critical of Lewins' approach, suggesting that it is too linear in an ever changing environment and in line with their thinking Lewins' model will be used under the overall context of consistent evaluation and change.
6. Action Research requires an understanding of the ethical framework, values and norms within which it is used in a particular context: The team assembled for this project have been selected for their technical skills and their understanding of the organisational framework within which this program was and continues to be implemented. All members of the team have had regular interactions with the TAM team in their day to day activities

prior to this program and two members were selected from the TAM team directly.

7. Action Research can include all types of data gathering methods: There is a team within the organisation dedicated to the development and implementation of feedback requests. This team was engaged to develop a survey on the effectiveness of the program and was rolled out anonymously to participants in the program following the completion of the technical evaluation. This data was a key metric to the companies' perception of the success of the program and was based on Net Promoter Score. Ad-hoc qualitative data was also be gathered through conversational interaction with the participants throughout the program and there were interviews carried out with a select few participants randomly to gain further insight into the success and future direction of the program, and upon which the final findings of this paper were based.
8. Action Research requires a breadth of pre-understanding of the corporate environment: The researcher is engaged with this project having over ten years' experience within the organisation and having operated in various roles over that period of time.
9. Action Research should be conducted in real time: This research has been carried out in real time with a pilot program put in place in Q1 of 2015 and is an ongoing program which is still under development.
10. The Action Research paradigm requires its own quality criteria: The success or failure of the program will be determined by the level of engagement from the TAM team, the number of candidates who successfully complete the program and ultimately how the TAM teams' new skillset enhances the customer experience. The company will also have its own measure of success of the program based on post evaluation surveys and using the Net Promoter Score as a basis for the measurement.

4.8 Action Research Rationale

With no numerical base available in the literary works to examine the exact effects of using adult education theory, the research lends itself more aptly to the use of interviews to gather the resulting feelings of the participants. The interviews allowed for greater flexibility on behalf of the researcher and the participants to express their views on the changes to the developing program. The participants' feelings, ideas and perceptions are not quantifiable and a measure of the success of the changes could not be measured against a control group, as such qualitative research lends itself to the research for more appropriate results.

The primary objective of the research is to create a program of learning for the TAM team. While qualitative and quantitative research are aimed at gathering data to advance academic research, action research is about advancing theory by resolving problems on the job in real world context. As this researcher is actively involved in the changes in the organisation, this research paper lends itself most accurately to an action research method.

4.9 Empirical Grounding

Saunders et al. (2012) described action research as a means to "develop solutions to real organisation problems" and that it would "have implications for participants and the organisation beyond the research project". This definition applies to the real problem of education facing the TAMs and is expected to have a long term implications for the team and the organisation as a whole. This researcher is involved in the program and Gummesson (2000) highlights a characteristic of the action researcher as one who takes action and operates in real time. It was felt by the researcher that this form of research was best fitted to the nature of the program and the overall goals of the program.

4.10 Alternative Considerations

Questionnaires were considered as an alternative to interviews but as the organisation was rolling out surveys as an organisational requirement, it was felt that survey fatigue may reduce the number and quality of the responses. Porter, Whitcomb and Weitzer (2004) discussed these concerns as it applied to students, while Gofton (1999) referred to the impact in a marketing scenario. The researcher also felt that interviews would give a better depth of feedback from the participants of the program and would provide a greater scope for future development of the program.

4.11 Sampling

There were multiple approaches to sampling taken owing to the nature of the research undertaken. Primarily the target audience of the program provided a ready-made sample of participants for the research and sampling was taken out of the hands of the researcher. In a sense this was purposive sampling as the participants were sampled as they applied to the research questions being posed.

For the interview stage of the research, a convenience sample was taken from the participants who had completed the program to the stage covered by this research paper. A number of interview requests were delivered to all participants who completed the program within a set 2 week period and interviews were conducted with the accepting participants.

4.12 Sample Group

The participants in the program were all members of the same organisation, in the same role and it was a company requirement for them to complete the program. At the time of completion of this research, not all members of the organisation have completed the program, however over 400 of the 470 members have completed the program at the time of writing.

The interviewees were all part of the TAM team and all had successfully navigated the developed section of the program. As such, these were seen as a reliable source of data when conducting the interviews on the development of the program and changes they would make. By the fifth interview it was apparent that the same themes were being addressed and similar responses were being supplied by the interviewees, that it was sufficient to draw findings for this research.

4.13 Interview Style

Cachia and Millward (2011) discussed the natural fit of semi-structured interviews and the telephone medium, as telephone conversations are naturally agenda driven rather than strict questions and answers. Considering that all interviews used the medium of telephone, the interviews were conducted in a semi-structured fashion, with a list of areas and questions pre-prepared by the researcher however the researcher also allowed for the interviewee or the researcher to explore areas of interest raised by the participant.

4.14 Interview Themes

The literature focused heavily on the inclusion of participants in the development and improvement of learning programs, and the themes explored in the interviews focused on the aspects of learning that the participants have enjoyed in the past and would like to see in the future. The researcher wanted to explore the connection between the real life experiences of participants both within the context of the developed program and their historical experiences, as opposed to the academic works.

The full list of questions asked are included in Appendix 1, while a transcript of the interview is included as Appendix 2 to 6. The first half of questions revolved around the participants' preference for learning and their historical experiences with learning programs, while the second half of the questions focused on the participants experience with the newly developed program and changes they would like to see going forward.

4.15 Data Collection

All interviews were conducted live via Lync voice over IP and were recorded through the software. The interviews lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes each. In keeping with the strategies for interviewing outlined by Trull (1964) the start of each interview involved building a rapport with the participant so as to “minimize the immediate barriers to forthright communication”. The researcher aimed to steer the participant through the discussion in a semi-formal manner allowing the researcher to explore in more detail some of the specific individual feedback offered by the participant. In most cases the questions were not asked in a strict format as the interview style allowed for the answering of the questions to flow between the topics. In some cases a question may have been asked of one interviewee which did not apply to another interviewee such as;

“What training have you completed in other companies that you have liked?”

In this case the interviewee had no prior experience outside of the company.

Notes were not taken during the interviews to allow for a smooth flow of conversation and allowed the researcher to focus full attention on the interview. The research took note of the advantages of recordings over notes. While McGloin (2015) discussed the information missed by people when taking notes on a laptop compared to hand written notes, the researcher decided that any information missed would not be ideal to the study. The recordings also allowed for the researcher to listen back to the interview multiple times.

The researcher stored each of the digital recordings on a secure Cloud server with restricted access and transcribed the recordings later.

All participants of the Champions program automatically receive a company developed survey as an internal measure of the quality of the program delivered. The researcher was not involved in the development of

these surveys but they are based on an industry standard of Net Promoter Score. These surveys are returned and stored anonymously on the companies servers. Data from these surveys has been made available to the researcher and is used in this research as a guide to the success or failure of changes made to the program.

Informal conversational data was collected throughout the launch and delivery of the program and this feedback has directed some of the changes made in the delivery and learnings gathered. This is in line with Gummesson (2000) comments that Action Research should be carried out in real time.

4.16 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in two stages. The first stage involved the action research portion of the research paper and the four step cyclical approach outlined with action research was applied to the program in in this paper in order to develop and implement the program and upskill the Technical Account Management team. Each of the iterations of the program followed the methodical approach of Plan, Do, Check and Act known as the Deming Cycle after Dr. W Edwards Deming's 1950 lecture in Japan. This is accepted by many as a scientific method of product design (Johnson 2002; Moen & Norman 2012) and improving decision making (Sylvia, 1992), and is very similar to the process outlined by Saunders et al (2012) of Diagnosing, Planning, Taking Action, Evaluating.

Plan: In the planning stage, engagement with the key individuals and teams enabled the researcher to set the scope of the next iteration and key milestones were put in place in terms of development timelines, progress and participation. At the first stage the TAM leadership team were the primary stakeholders in the initial outline of the program. The key stakeholders at later iterations were defined based on the requirements set out in the check phase of the previous iteration. Part of the planning stage was to create a list of stakeholders and resource requirements. These resources included but were not restricted to, the technical training team, the support tools team, the marketing team and the survey team. The required process flows were also drafted at this stage.

Do: The training materials and evaluation was developed in the initial iteration. Further developments depended on the learnings from the previous iteration. At each iteration a pilot team of volunteers from each region were engaged to participate in the program. These pilots consisted of no more than 5% of the TAM team globally.

Check: Feedback was gathered through observation, informal feedback from the participants and through company developed surveys. All feedback through observation, survey and informal feedback was discussed by the team at regular intervals with each point being considered on its merit.

Act: Any agreed changes were fed back into the planning process of the next iteration.

The program is an ongoing program and is expected to take up to three years to fully role out, however this research focused on the first three cycles of the roll out owing to time constraints.

The interviews took on a different analysis method. The researcher took a thematic analytical view of the data in an effort to see if the feedback from the interviews matched up with the andragogy principles outlined by Knowles (1973). The interviews were first transcribed and through the transcription process the researcher took note of certain themes while mentally noting their connection to the andragogy theory. A four step approach to narrowing down the data was suggested by Kane and O'Reilly De Brún (2001). Their framework included reducing the data, displaying the data, drawing conclusions and finally verifying the data. Each interview was read repeatedly by the researcher and three key themes were developed and the data was displayed in a table and the findings discussed and compared to the andragogy theory. This approach is in line with an inductive approach to data analysis as outlined by Saunders et al (2009), which put the method ahead of the theory to gain a greater understanding, as opposed to deductive reasoning outlined by Bryman (2008) which looks to prove or disprove a theory based on quantitative data.

4.17 Participant Anonymity

To ensure the quality of the data gathered, all participants were offered full anonymity as suggested by Trull (1968) as a first step to a good interview. All interviews were conducted on company grounds. For publication purposes all interviewees were coded as “Participant 1-5”.

The company at the centre of the research is coded as Company A and any other companies referenced throughout the interviews are also coded. The researcher did his best to code any information likely to make participating interviewees’ or the companies referenced identifiable.

4.18 Ethics & Trust Issues

The researcher adhered at all times to the ethical guidelines as dictated by NCI. Owing to the nature of the research, the researcher and some of the participants had a formal working knowledge of each other. Each participant willingly participated in the research and any data obtained was used solely for the stated cause. Each participant was presented with a consent form digitally and gave verbal consent on the call and written consent via e-mail. A copy of the consent form is attached as appendix 7.

The interview recordings were agreed to be held for a period of 1 year on a secure server.

As a gesture of thanks, the researcher offered to send a completed copy of the Dissertation to any interested participants, however none of the participants accepted the offer on the grounds that the evidence of their feedback would be seen through the improvement of their educational resources.

4.19 Research Limitations and Considerations

This research was carried out on a specific multi-regional team within a single multi-national organisation. While the aim of the research was only to improve the training methods within this organisation, the findings may or may not be applicable to other organisations.

The participants interviewed were all sourced from the same region and this could skew the feedback on cultural grounds. It would have been ideal to gather a wider sample from each of the regions, however due to time, language and access limitations. The researcher did reach out to more Technical Account Managers for interviews, however many did not reply or were too busy to meet within an acceptable time line. As the interviews were carried out, it became clear to the researcher that certain themes were discussed by all members and it was felt by the researcher that no further interviews were needed.

For confidentiality reasons, internal formal meetings with senior management were not permitted to be recorded however these meetings heavily influenced the direction of the program. The researcher has noted throughout the findings, where these meetings have influenced the direction of the program.

There were strict time lines on the development and implementation of the program and this has impacted on the development time and the academic influence on some of the choices made. Internal budget limitations also influenced choices of delivery and content development.

Chapter 5 – Findings

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter we will discuss the design, implementation and the progress of the champions program and the factors influencing the changes to the design through three iterations. This limit is dictated by the time factors governing the program. We will also address the findings from the interviews carried out following the introduction of the champions program ahead of the release of the next phase. These findings will be discussed in a thematic fashion as outlined in chapter 4.

5.2 Iteration 1

5.2.1 Champions 100, 200 and 300

The key stakeholders of the TAM management team and the coaches gathered to set a scope and guidelines for the Champions program to progress. It was agreed that the upskilling of the TAMs should be conducted in a phased approach and that one size would not fit all candidates, as some TAMs would need to have a higher level of knowledge on some subjects than others. The overall goal of the program was and is to to improve the TAMs confidence in speaking to their customers about technology and solutions in their environment, improving the relationship and growing the business. A three stage progressive approach was agreed and was labeled the level 100, level 200 and level 300 of the Champions program.

Champions 100 was designed to be a level setting of the organization. To set a foundation of knowledge across a broad range of topics covering the hardware, tools, services and an overall framework in which this knowledge is used to help the TAMs assist their customers.

The goal of level 200 of the Champions program is to provide more targeted, in-depth knowledge on the subjects' individual TAMs needed to know for the customers in their specific portfolio. For example, a new TAM may be dealing with customers with small environments with no storage capabilities. A foundational level of knowledge in storage technologies would help the TAM in this scenario to address any potential new storage needs the customer had, however a more experienced TAM might deal with a global customer with multiple data centers where storage is fundamental to the running of their business. In this case, the experienced TAM would be eligible to develop their storage capabilities through the level 200 storage courses.

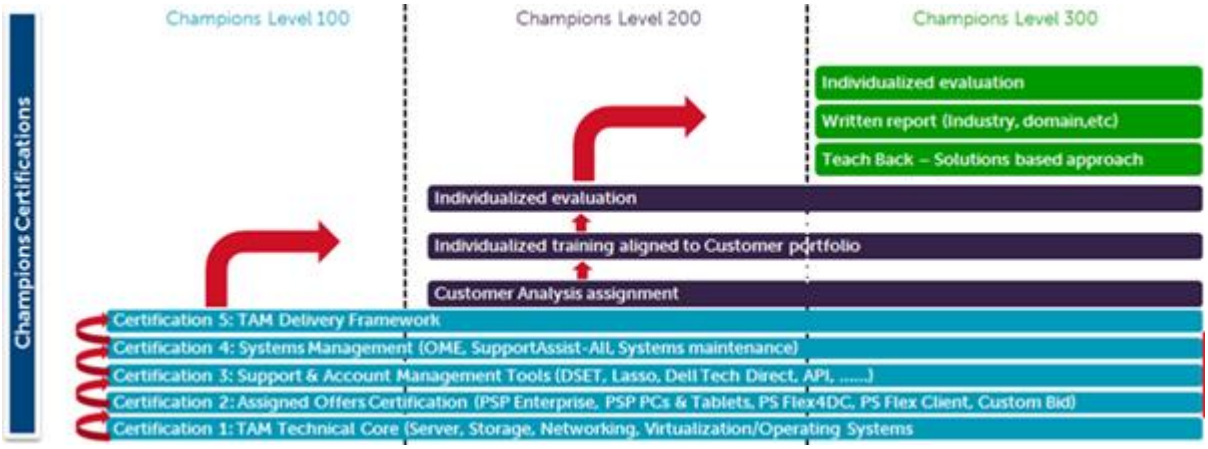
Finally, the level 300 certification is aimed at teaching back to the organization. Many of our customers engage in projects outside of the

knowledge of the organization, but which our TAMs are privy too. In one example, a customer and their TAM are involved in the implementation of a cutting edge microwave networking design. This design could advance the knowledge of the organization overall, and would be an excellent project for a white paper which could be used to help other customers.

5.2.2 Champions 100

To design the foundation course a list of business requirements were created and broken down and a list of five categories emerged. These categories were:

- Technical Core - Consisting of hardware and technical concepts
- Assigned Offers - Made up of the various warranties and services available to the customer
- Support and Account management Tools – Tools used to help a customer when technical support is needed and tools used by the TAM to aid in the development of reporting to identify improvements in the customers' environment.
- Systems Management – A collection of tools designed to help the customer manage and administer their IT infrastructure.
- TAM Delivery Framework – This consisted of a collection of soft skills such as communication, presentation and problem solving competencies required by the TAM.



5.2.3 Technical Core

Plan:

The organization has set the direction of the business and is looking to focus on enterprise products under four pillars. These pillars have been underpinned by acquisitions within the areas of server, storage, networking and virtualization. As such the technical core certification was broken up into these four areas. Time lines were set very strictly for the development of the program and needed to contain a training plan and an evaluation. An emphasis was put on releasing the training as soon as possible as this would be the first step for the TAMs to complete.

Do:

Training bundles

With the tight time lines it was decided that releasing the training to the TAM community was of top priority. By doing this, more time could be spent developing a strong evaluation while the TAM teams went through the training. To give the TAMs flexibility and control over their training plan, it was agreed that the training should be delivered in a virtual environment. With only 5 coaches to cover 470 TAMs and the evaluation to be developed, the idea of an online course was suggested. Technical training was considered too technical for the TAMs, however it was agreed that a modified version of the technical training courses, which were already in an online format, could be delivered. The 5 coaches agreed on key technology points in each category, for example, the technical support teams in the server departments' highest call drivers are around hard drives and memory. With this in mind, hard drives and memory formed a key part of the server training bundle and would need to form a basis for the server portion of the evaluation. The coaches examined the existing technical training courses, pulling out the conceptual information and created 6 training modules for the TAMs which would make up the TAM Technical Core training. The 6 courses were made up of 2 server courses, 2 storage courses, a networking course

and an Operating System/virtualization course. There were 2 courses for each of the server and storage topics in order to address all of the concepts and the products. It was accepted that these courses were not an ideal solution for the TAMs as they were not interactive, however they would get across the required information and the TAMs could go through the courses at their own pace. A multiple choice assessment was developed for the end of each course and an overall multiple choice assessment was also created. These assessments were designed as knowledge checks and are a familiar format within the organisation, but they would not be the final evaluation for the technical core certification. A coach led training course was considered, however with the limited resources available, this was not possible.

Evaluation

It was decided that the evaluation would be a key selling point of the champions program, and the evaluation would be designed in such a way as to promote the development of the TAM. With this in mind, it was agreed that the evaluation would be done verbally and be aimed at replicating a scenario the TAMs might encounter on the job. With 2 of the coaches having come from the TAM community, they were able to devise 4 customer scenarios and the questions asked during the evaluation were positioned from the point of view of these customers. A question pool was developed by the remaining coaches, making sure that they were broken up into categories to match the requirements set out in the development of the training. These questions were developed in a conversational style and the answers were dependant on the individual design set up in the scenario. The answers would need to be answered in a conversational style and an answer key was developed based on key words and concepts. This way there could be a consistency in marking but a true depth of understanding could be assessed. A pilot was run within the coaching team to determine the time lines on the evaluation and the evaluation length was agreed at 1 hour with 12 questions being asked in that one hour, 4 each on servers and storage, with 2 each on networking and virtualization. These scenarios and questions would be

randomized to ensure the evaluations were different for each TAM and that a largest breadth of knowledge could be covered.

The TAMs would score a 1, 3 or a 5 on each of the questions and an overall pass mark of 80% was agreed, but also an 80% pass mark was required to pass each of the individual sections. The evaluations would be delivered in the form of successful or unsuccessful, and a post evaluation report would be written up by the coach conducting the evaluation, regardless of the result of the evaluation. This report was to be delivered in plain English and would provide direction to the TAM on the areas in which they were strong and areas in which they needed improvement. The post evaluation report would be discussed in a one to one meeting to ensure the TAM understands the result, buys into the development and accepts the feedback. Unsuccessful TAMs would then be required to address their gaps and resit the evaluation in their own time.

Check:

A controlled launch of the program was completed with a selection of the highest performing TAMs in each region as nominated by the TAM leaders. This controlled launch was run to gather feedback on the training and the evaluation. Each coach sat in on the evaluation run by another coach as a means of verifying and calibrating the results. Feedback was gathered from each TAM after the evaluation on the training and the evaluation. Greater detail was gathered during the interview stage of the research.

Three clear observations were gathered from the pilot. Firstly, the general feedback was extremely positive towards the evaluation style. It was much preferred to an online or written evaluation as it allowed for interaction with the coach and the job based nature of the evaluation. These comments were reflected in the post evaluation surveys carried out independently by the business.

*"**How could this program be improved?***

I liked the way tests were done, I think this should continue like this (Student_ 33773195)"

At the same time, the training materials were widely criticised and this again was reflected in the organisational run surveys.

*"**How could this program be improved?***

I do believe the training materials should be totally reviewed and updated (Student_41122149)"

"What suggestions do you have that would have increased your involvement?

There was too much eLearning and needs more blended learning (Student_43432265)"

The company surveys also delivered a Net Promoter Score of approximated 52%, suggesting that there was some work to do to improve the engagement of the TAMs.

The third observation came from the coaches running the evaluations. It was universally accepted there was not enough variety to the questions in order to ensure that each evaluation was unique, and that the scenarios and questions would not get shared amongst the TAM community.

Act:

All of the feedback was discussed between the coaches and in order to address the concerns of the TAMs. The first item debated was the lack of variation in the evaluations. There were two options posited to address this. The team could generate more questions or they could generate more scenarios. Generating more scenarios had a multiplier effect as many of the existing questions could be reused in the new scenarios as the answers would now be different, but the same subject matter would be assessed. As

a result it was agreed to double the number of scenarios and rework the answer keys to the questions to fit the new scenarios.

The second item debated was the feedback on the training materials. While it was expected that the TAMs would comment on the training materials considering they were not purpose developed for the TAMs, the universal dislike meant that something needed to be changed before a full launch of the program could commence.

5.3 Iteration 2

Plan:

In order to address the training concerns, a meeting was arranged with the TAM management to come up with ideas to address the concern. During the meeting it was made clear that timelines were extremely important to the business as they were already selling the latest warranties and the TAM community needed to upskill as soon as possible. With this in mind a short term solution to the problem was needed, however it was also agreed that the budget would be sought to redevelop the eLearning training.

The feedback in organisation surveys were also reviewed and the comment from Student_43432265, requesting more blended learning led to a request for the coaches to offer virtual learning sessions with the TAMs who required more assistance ahead of the evaluation. This would expand the program but also address the short term need for better training while the eLearning requests were made. The concept was that the TAMs could go through the eLearning as it was, and could then book time with a coach on one of the subjects they were having trouble with. These sessions would be short, 30 minute sessions, and the coach could encourage learning between TAMs if the sessions were group sessions. The sessions would need to be carried out in a virtual environment, just like the evaluation, as the TAMs were not local to the coaches. It was felt a maximum of 6 TAMs should be engaged in these sessions in order for everyone to have their issues addressed. There was a concern that some of the TAMs would not want to discuss their lack of knowledge in front of their colleagues, so it was suggested that one to one sessions also should be offered.

Do:

A business case was created to request approval for an improved budget to get the eLearning material updated. As internal resources were all scheduled to other tasks within the business and could not be freed up, the

coaches developed a requirement list for the new eLearning modules and a quote was requested from an external vendor. The business case was delivered with the quote to the senior management team and approval was granted for the training to be redeveloped to meet the specific needs of the TAMs. The development of the new materials was expected to take up to six months.

Five different coaching sessions were developed by the coaches and made available to the TAMs. Group sessions in each of the server, storage, networking and virtualization, and a subject agnostic one to one session. The coaches reviewed all of the subjects in the eLearning and identified the subjects which were felt to be most confusing or difficult to understand. They then created analogies for each of those subjects to enable a consistent approach to the coaching sessions. For example, networking concepts were compared to a postal system.

There was no time to do a pilot on the coaching sessions, so these sessions were launched as part of the full release of the program, however a daily conference call was arranged between the coaches in order to keep track of the feedback on the coaching sessions and the evaluations.

Check:

Through the release of the program a number of issues came to the fore through various channels. Feedback from the coaching sessions were generally positive, however a trend of the sessions was that they were not booked and used as group sessions, but rather as one to one sessions. The TAMs also preferred the run the coaching sessions more as instructor led training sessions as they felt that the eLearning was so poor that the entire curriculum needed to be covered again. This feedback was also reflected in the organisational surveys with comments such as:

> ***"How could this program be improved?***
> *Better revision materials. (Student_40192436)"*

*"**What suggestions do you have that would have increased your involvement?***

More learning programs (Student_43458334)"

An improvement in the Net Promoter Score was also observed with the score increasing from the 52% observed in the pilot to approximately 70%, suggesting that the changes have improved the acceptance and engagement with the program.

Feedback was continued to be delivered on the evaluations and coaches felt that the improved scenario numbers were sufficient to ensure that each evaluation would be unique. There was also a small number of challenges to the results of the evaluation and the coaches also felt that they had marked some of the TAMs unsuccessful in their evaluations unfairly which were not challenged by the TAMs in question. The challenges and the coach feedback revolved around a situation where the TAM would have scored strongly across the board, however as the networking and virtualisation areas of the evaluation only contained two questions, should a TAM fail to answer one of those questions incorrectly and score a 1, they would fail that particular topic and therefore fail the overall evaluation.

The business language of the company is English and as such the eLearning, the evaluations and the coaching were all developed and delivered in English in every region. Several TAMs in the German. French, Japanese and Korean regions made requests for the materials to be translated into local languages. A request would have been expected from China too, however our coach in the APJ region speaks Chinese and was able to informally deliver the coaching and evaluations in Chinese.

Act:

The coaches looked to address the challenges to the evaluation first. While it is still important for the TAMs to know and show proficiency in each of the topics, time restrictions on the evaluations meant that the number of

questions in each of the sections could not be increased. It was suggested that perhaps a tie break question could be used in situations where a TAM may fail by a single question. The tie break question would be picked at random from the section in which the missed question came from. If the question is answered correctly, then the TAM would pass the evaluation however an action would be given in the follow up evaluation report to address the gap in knowledge identified in the evaluation. Should the tie break question be answered incorrectly, then the TAM and the coach could feel comfortable in calling the evaluation unsuccessful.

To address the language gap, two options were discussed. All of the materials could have been translated, or translators could sit in on the evaluations and act as mediators. Both options would come with increased budget requirements and these options would need to be taken to the TAM management.

In discussing the coaching sessions it was clear to the coaches that direction was needed for the TAMs before they got to the coaching sessions, as the eLearning was currently not providing the required level of knowledge or direction and didn't help the TAMs to self-study. A workbook was suggested to allow the TAMs to test their own knowledge after the eLearning and to help them to direct their study. This way the TAMs could come to the coaching sessions with questions to help them fill in the gaps in the workbooks.

5.4 Iteration 3

Plan:

Four workbooks were developed by the coaches, one in each of the categories of the evaluation. The workbooks were created so as to ask questions to test knowledge. This differentiated them from the evaluation which was designed to evaluate the comprehension of the knowledge in a real world, on the job scenario. The TAMs would now complete the eLearning, test their knowledge using the workbooks, bring their questions to the coaches in a coaching session and finally conduct the verbal evaluation.

As the coaching sessions were only being attended by one TAM at a time, it was agreed that it would set the right tone for the coaching sessions to change all of them to general one to one coaching sessions. This also reduced the complexity of the design of the program and made it easier to schedule the sessions.

During the meeting with the TAM managers on the language difficulties, it was made clear that no budget would be made available for translation services of any kind. An alternative suggestion was made by the TAM managers that if an individual needed language support for the evaluation, then they could approach their direct line manager who would attend the evaluation as a translator for that individual, or they would arrange for another line manager to act as a translator. This way the TAMs concerns could be addressed but there would be little to no impact on the budget of the project.

Do:

The workbooks were posted on an internal website for the TAMs to download if they needed them and a communication went out to inform the TAMs of the availability of the workbooks, the availability of the TAM

managers to assist with translation and about the changes to the coaching sessions.

Check:

The final feedback on the program to date was gathered as part of the interviews and is addressed in the thematic analysis below. These interviews are also being used to inform the next stage of the Champions 100 certificate. The Net Promoter Score observed at this stage of the program had increased to 90%, suggesting the program was widely accepted and is seen by the organisation as a success.

Act:

Five interviews were carried out with candidates who had successfully completed the technical core evaluation.

5.5 Interview Findings

5.5.1 Presentation of Findings

This section will focus on the key findings from the interviews carried out with the TAMs who had completed the Technical Core aspect of the Champions program. The interviews focused on the learning styles of the interviewees and their experiences with the Champions program. The participants' responses are grouped and addressed under three thematic headings.

5.5.2 Theme 1: Learning

Each of the participants were questioned on the methods they felt helped them to learn. The responses varied between a preference to self-study, using online resources and books, and classroom training where the sessions are interactive.

Participant 5 advised that he liked to study alone when preparing for exams, with regular knowledge checks, however he did also make positive comments on the group style of learning as part of his ongoing MBA.

Participant 5

"What I prefer is to do an initial step of individual learning to bring myself to a level that would allow me then to get into a group discussion. Especially if it is on a topic that I have never seen before."

Two of the participants expressed a dislike for individual and online learning, while they, plus another participant, expressed a preference for trainer led interactive sessions.

Participant 1 commented that while he could read and understand the knowledge on the page, as soon as he turned the page he had already forgotten the information, however if he could explain the concept to another person, he could be sure that he understood it, showing that the interactive nature of the session added to his learning experience.

Participant 1

"I read stuff and then it's clear for me but if I turn the page I already forgot it. It's not that I didn't understand it, I don't remember it that good. So normally when I have to learn something I try to understand it and then explain it to someone. I try to learn it in a course, then use it and explain it to someone. If I see that the other person understands what I tell them then I see that I have understood it."

An understanding of the cost advantages of online learning was expressed by Participant 3, however she also advised that she found that format extremely difficult. Interactivity was highlighted as a key to her learning, similarly to Participant 1. She also emphasised the need for a continuity of learning, worrying that she would lose her newly attained knowledge if it was not used or refreshed on a regular basis.

Participant 3

"It's not very easy to sit down to go through slide after slide on your own. That I find quite difficult. Training that I have gone through that I've liked would be more interactive or classroom based."

Both participant 1 and participant 2 expressed a need for the learning to be challenging in order for it to be effective, and all 5 participants expressed a need for real world application based training. This real world application was a theme that ran through all areas of the 5 interviews and will be discussed in detail as a separate theme below.

5.5.3 Theme 2: Champions program

All of the participants were asked about their experience with the Champions program, the materials used, the evaluation and what they liked and disliked about the program. All 5 of the participants were impressed overall with the Champions program so far, with participant 2 commenting that “it is a good approach, the best that we have seen to date”, participant 5 calling it “very beneficial” and participant 3 calling it “an amazing program. I think it's been really positive”. Participants 1, 2, and 5 all commended the overall sequence of learning employed by the program.

Participant 5

“I completed the workbooks and I did the coaching lessons in this sequence. So I first did the eLearning, then I tried to work on the workbooks and provided answers by myself and then I went on the coaching. And I found this particular sequence quite effective”

While all participants utilized all of the different materials available to them, specific praise was given to the coaching sessions by participants 3 and 4. Participant 3 felt lucky to have gotten one to one sessions with the coach and really liked that the coaching could focus in on her weaker points. Participant 4 felt that the coaching sessions were of a high enough standard that they may have been enough on their own for the TAMs to pass the evaluation.

For participant 1, the evaluation was the highlight of the program, a sentiment which was echoed by participants 5, who felt it was “perfect for the level that is required” by the TAMs, and participant 2 because the coach was able to “delve in different directions” and was “able to evaluate pretty clearly how much the employee knew”. Of particular note was that participant 2 saw the development focus of the evaluation, stating that “you understand more by failing it than you would by passing it”. Participant 3 was impressed with the interactive nature of the evaluation and felt the video conferencing technology used, helped her to feel more comfortable for the evaluation.

On a final note, each of the participants were asked how they would improve the Champions program or, given the chance to start with a clean slate, how they would design the next stage of the Champions program. Two main suggestions came from this question. Firstly, as expected, the eLearning was criticized by most of the participants. Even participants 2 and 5, who liked the eLearning, felt that the information was lacking and out of date. Participant 3 went as far as suggesting that the eLearning be removed altogether, which matched with participant 4s comments that the TAMs may have passed through use of the coaching sessions only. Participants 1 and 5 suggested that the eLearning should be more modular and interactive, suggesting that the current form of eLearning is too long and not engaging. The second main request was for the information to be directly related to the job, which will be discussed further below.

5.5.4 Theme 3: Job based learning

A clear theme running through all of the interviews was the preference for job and scenario based learning. Participant 4 felt that the TAM role was very difficult to evaluate because “a lot of the skills are undefinable”. To address this problem they suggested running “a dummy escalation” to see how they performed in a real life scenario. He further expanded this to suggest there would need to be several scenarios without a definitive answer in order to encourage the TAMs to problem solve on the job rather than memorize knowledge.

Participant 1 explained that they learned best when they could have something explained to them and then they could practice it and do some hands on learning. At a previous company they worked for, participant 1 highlighted the benefits of using a workshop as a form of learning. The learning path began with slides but allowed the customer of these workshops to test their learning in a real world situation.

Participant 2 referenced the 70:20:10 model for learning (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1996), stating that they believed that was applicable to real life. Based on this, he suggested that an improvement to the program would include mentoring on the job so that the Champions program could expand from the 10% formal educational events, into the 20% interactions based learning and even into the 70% on the job learning outlined in the 70:20:10 model.

The third participant highlighted interaction with a trainer as something that was important to her. She went on to say that this was effective because the training could give real life examples and apply the knowledge to real life situations for her customers. This was also mentioned a reason she liked the coaching sessions as “there were a lot of real life situations that were used, so when it's applied to your day to day role I think it's easier to retain the information that way”.

Similarly, participant 5 talked about hands on experience as part of his preferred method of learning, commenting that “it adds a lot of value if it is

more hands on, so experience related if you will". When given an opportunity to discuss how he would develop the next stage of the program, the suggestion was that the program should revolve around a "customer scenario type of discussion".

Chapter 6 – Discussion of Findings

6.1 Introduction

All 5 of the interviewees expressed a desire for on the job or role based learning which seems to reflect the andragogy theory explored in Chapter 2. In this chapter we will discuss in detail on how each of the findings outlined in Chapter 5 might be explained by literature explored in Chapter 2. The chapter will take the form of a discussion and the outline will be based on the objectives laid out in Chapters 1 and 3.

6.2 Objective 1: Create a program to technically upskill the existing multi-regional Technical Account Management team

Like Jones (1980), this project development didn't directly apply the principals of andragogy, however they were considered and also influenced the development of the program. Birzer (2003) suggested that certain situations didn't suit the andragogy principals, while others did, and even in the development of this program, that was clear. When creating the online eLearning, it was not possible to incorporate the andragogy principals, however the TAM interviews were mixed in their feedback on this type of learning. Two of the participants expressed this type of learning as a preferred method to begin learning, while two expressed a clear dislike for this form or learning. At the same time all of the participants expressed a like for the coaching sessions. This seems to match up with Hartrees' (1984) and Hansons' (1996) assertions that the line between child and adult is not distinct. It would appear from this research that some adults still prefer tradition pedagogical methods of learning, where the learning is "taught dependant 'Passive' Learning" (Knowles, 1990), but at the same time, some students adhere more closely to the andragogy self-directed style of learning put forward by Knowles. Knowles (1984) did acknowledge that pedagogy and andragogy were not diametrically opposed, but worked on a scale. This research seems to suggest that the position on the scale is individualised to the learner and that a one size fits all approach to the dissemination of knowledge is not ideal.

While discussing Knowles (1984), Kearsley (2010) advised that "Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction". This seemed to match up with Lewins (1947) change model, which suggested that engaging with the subjects of change will help the unfreezing of the existing state before making the change. Ingalls (1972) suggested a seven stage process to applying andragogy, which culminated in the implementation of the program, the evaluation of the results and the redesigning of activities. This approach is similar to the Deming cycle or the cyclical design of action research laid out by Saunders et al (2012) of Diagnosing, Planning, Taking Action, and Evaluating. With this in mind, this

program engaged with the TAM team and its managers in developing the initial scope for the program, included pilot sessions and gathered feedback throughout the program. It was clear that by listening to the feedback and implementing changes to address the needs of the TAM organisation that the satisfaction with the program increased. For example, the eLearning content delivered in the Champions program was all content centred, aimed at transferring the knowledge to the TAMs. The immediate feedback from the first pilot was that the eLearning was not sufficient for the needs of the TAMs and the coach led, coaching sessions were offered also to help bridge that gap. This seems to contradict Knowles assertion that adults are self-directed human beings who are no longer dependent.

One of the key aspects of the andragogy theory outlined by Kearsley (2010) was the link between adults and their jobs. He tells us that “adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance to their job”. During this research each of the five interviewees were most interested in linking what they had learned to their role and their future role within the business. One of the participants highlighted the works of Lombardo & Eichinger (1996), who developed the 70:20:10 rule. It was the opinion of this participant that the majority of his learning happened on the job in line with their theory and that the best learning programs helped with learning on the job. The aspects of the Champions program that were enjoyed the most, and the aspects of previous training programs the participants had engaged on and enjoyed, were all based in real world situations. In relation to the Champions program, participant three mentioned that she could see the benefits of the coaching sessions as she could see the coach apply the knowledge to real world situations, while participant five said that the real value of learning programs came from hands on, experience related learning. This job learning approach links in with another one of Kearsleys points that “Adult learning is problem-centred rather than content-oriented” and Knowles (1984) assertion that as people grow their perspectives shift from being subject centred to problem centred. Having said that, some of the participants did enjoy the eLearning which was very much subject centred, suggesting that not all adults transition away from a subject centred learning

style. With all of the participants enjoying the job centred learning, it is clear that problem centred learning is universally enjoyed. Without a control group of children to compare it to, this researcher could not come to the conclusion that adults are different to children in this way.

The changes requested by the TAMs through the various iterations seemed to line up with Mezirows (1991) transformative learning theory. This expansion of andragogy talked about adults going from disorientation, to reflection and finally to reintegration. Similarly, when only the eLearning was available, the TAMs needed more to help with the disorientation and reflection phases, and the coaching and workbooks were able to address those needs. With coaching the TAMs could get clarity on items they did not fully understand and the workbooks enabled the TAMs to reflect on the knowledge they had gained. The evaluation was then a means of verifying if the TAMs had in fact reintegrated the information into working knowledge. We will discuss the role the evaluation has played in the development of the program, and in the context of the literature, in further detail below.

6.3 Objective 2: Identify how to evaluate the Technical Account Managers development through the program.

One of Knowles (1984) points was that adults have a wealth of experience on which to call upon to help with their learning. This was considered when developing the evaluation. By basing each question within a customer scenario that the TAM may have encountered in their role up until now, the TAMs could tap into that experience to help them answer the questions in line with the newly acquired knowledge from the coaching and the eLearning.

Similarly, by basing the evaluation in a real life job scenario, it touched on another of Knowles (1984) considerations for adult learning. As discussed in relation to the entirety of the Champions program, by making the evaluation closer to the TAM role and not totally focused on the subjects, it helped the TAMs to feel at ease doing an evaluation which would normally be a nervous situation for them. It also helped the TAMs to engage with the evaluation, even with some more experienced TAMs who were less technical and more resistant to the changes. The technology and face to face nature of the evaluation was also a factor in the climate setting. This is in line with Ingalls (1972) proposed states for applying andragogy, with stage one about setting the right climate to encourage co-operation and learning, and stage seven about evaluating the learning experience. Participant 3 of the interviews made particular note that the interactive nature of the evaluation and the face to face video conferencing which helped her feel more comfortable.

Mezirows (1991) ten stage transformative learning theory, built upon Knowles andragogy theory, tells us that the learning experience should built competence and self-confidence. This was a consideration when developing the evaluation. It was important to the organisation that the evaluation be a learning experience rather than a traditional test. The evaluation feedback was a key component to this and was recognised by the TAMs as such, with interviewee 2 noting that “you understand more by failing it than you would by passing it”. Kearsley (2010) agreed with this line of thinking by mentioning that experience, including mistakes, should be the basis for learning

activities, and as this evaluation rewards mistakes with direction, it is a safe environment in which the TAMs can learn. Scriven in the 60's highlighted two forms of assessment, summative at the end of the learning experience to test knowledge and formative used during the learning to promote the knowledge. The evaluation at the end of this stage of the champions program blended the two forms together, as an unsuccessful student would then be given direction in order to help them develop and promote the knowledge and learning experience, while for those who were successful, the assessment signalled the end of the learning experience to confirm the reintegration of the learning as per Mezirow (1991). This matches up more closely with Stiggins (2005) idea of evaluations being "Assessments FOR Learning". The result of the evaluations were given as successful or unsuccessful so that the grade was not the focus of the evaluation with the post assessment evaluation report giving direction in a clear, descriptive and very learning focused way.

As explored as part of theme 3 in chapter 5, job based learning was extremely important to all of the interviewees. Participant 4 suggested that the next stage of the Champions program should be based around real life escalations to see how the TAMs would react in a real world scenario, which is exactly how the evaluation for the technical core stage of the program was developed. This is all in line with Knowles (1984) and Kearsleys (2010) idea that adults are interested in subjects which have an immediate relevance to their jobs.

It was 1920 when McCall described standardized tests as the most important educational measurement when describing the educational system in the US. This highlights the importance performing an evaluation of some sorts plays on any educational system, however it is also important that the evaluation results hold integrity. Starch and Elliot (1912) and Brimi (2011) were able to highlight how much results can differ depending on the person marking the paper. This was observed during calibration sessions for the Champions evaluation, which is why measures were undertaken to ensure the results were as consistent as possible. The key words and phrases to be

hit in each answer reduced the ambiguity Brimi observed in English paper markings owing to individual preference to style of writing.

It is a testament to the design of the evaluation that universally the evaluations style was appreciated and considered to be an excellent means of evaluating the TAMs. The interviewees as well as the informal feedback backed the style of evaluation. With the first interviewee commenting that the evaluation was the highlight of the program. Interviewee 2 commenting on how effective the evaluation was at verifying the level of knowledge the TAMs had, which was a concern expressed by Popham (1999) when it came to tests evaluating enough of the information the participant was expected to learn. This was one of the benefits that conducting a verbal evaluation with randomised questions which was commented on by interviewee 2 who recognised that the coach could “delve in different directions”.

Chapter 7 – Conclusions

7.1 Opening Remarks

In this final chapter we will discuss the researchers' conclusions from the action research project in creating a new learning program and evaluation for adults. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 informed the researcher on nuances of adult education compared to traditional educational methods, while Chapters 4 and 5 covered the delivery and real world application of the educational program.

7.2 Objective 1

The Champions program has been considered a success within the TAM organisation so far, with many of the TAMs looking forward to the next stage of the program. By applying the adult education theory outlined by Knowles and others discussed in Chapter 2, the program was able to gather greater engagement and support. The changes to the program requested by the TAM team in its earlier stages were in line with the academic work, with special emphasis on the learning and delivery being directly related to the requirements of the job. This research would suggest that the primary aim of a learning program should be to relate the learning objectives and the learning techniques of the program directly to real world on the job scenarios that the students can relate to. By doing this the students will engage more, learn more and integrate the learnings faster.

There is some room in the findings to suggest that not all adults move away from traditional passive learning techniques, as the coaching sessions were introduced based on feedback from the TAMs to help bridge the gap between the self-directed eLearning and the final evaluation. While the eLearning was not liked by all of the TAMs and it would suggest that these should be offered as an alternative or additive rather than as a requirement, with coach led exercises forming the basis for the program.

7.3 Objective 2

The evaluation was the highlight of the program for many of the TAMs. By conducting the evaluation in a familiar job related scenario and making it a verbal evaluation, the TAMs were far more comfortable with the evaluation, which was in keeping with Ingalls (1972) seven stages of implementing andragogy theory.

In keeping with the academic works and the writings of Stiggins (2005) “Assessment FOR Learning”, by hiding the scores of the evaluations and delivering an in depth evaluation report to each TAM post evaluation, the evaluation was seen as a development tool rather than as a test to be afraid of. This really benefitted the learners in engaging with the learning objectives of the program and reaching the goals outlined by the business. The students were studying the material, not to pass the evaluation, but to advance their knowledge and understanding in order to advance their careers and could see the real world application that could directly help their customers.

7.4 Areas of Future Research

Some interesting questions arose from the development of the Champions program. There is currently some pressure from the TAM leadership to speed up the program for the next phase in order to save on costs. A suggestion by one of the TAMs that workshops worked well for them in a previous company could be explored to determine if group learning works better than individual learning environments, and by creating a group environment it could increase the throughput of the program to speed up the program and save costs.

With the criticism of andragogy being that it is ambiguous and that the line between child and adult is not distinct (Hartree, 1984), it would be interesting to apply the andragogy learning techniques to child learning to see if they respond differently to adults. In this research it was found that some adults still prefer traditional learning techniques, so it may also be the case that some children respond better to andragogy techniques.

While the eLearning courses as part of this program were under developed, it would be worth exploring the impact an improved, problem oriented rather than content oriented, interactive eLearning course would have on the preference of learning style.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Interview Question List

1. How do you feel you learn best?

    a. What types of training have you enjoyed in the past?
    b. What training courses have you taken that has stayed with you?
    c. What was it about that course that kept you interested?

2. What has been your experience of training to date?

    a. What has been your experience of the Champions 100 program so far?
    b. What is your impression of the Champions 100 training bundles?
    c. What is your impression of the Champions 100 technical evaluation?
    d. What other materials did you utilize to prepare for the evaluation? (coaching, workbooks, external materials)
    e. If so, what was useful about the other material?
    f. How would you improve the Champions program?

Appendix 2 – Interview 1:

F = Facilitator

P = Participant

Date: 3rd June 2015

I was hoping to get an understanding of what your experience of training up until now has been. I know you went through the champions program but before that, what has been good training sessions or bad training sessions you have been through?

At [Company name A removed]?

Anywhere, it doesn't matter. I want to throw out what the standard idea of what training has been. With the champions 100 we went through standard online training, standard evaluation type, it was a bit different in that we put a scenario based but I want to forget all of that. If we had a clean slate where would we start? What have you done before, what have you done in [Company name removed] and what have you done before that?

Well in [Company name B removed] I have done a bachelor's degree in economics and IT so I have a small background from there. I am not originally from the IT sector so I came from somewhere else. I did an apprenticeship as an electrician so quite a change there, but then I did a bachelors and after my bachelors then I joined [Company name B removed] and to be honest at [Company name B removed] they are not doing that much training. Well at least not technical training. There is the MCSE MPC which you can participate but those trainings take time and are not cheap. Of course you don't have to pay for the exam because they are in house but the course you have to pay and they are quite expensive and you don't have the time during the day for that, so I don't think that anyone ever did these courses if they didn't have to do it as part of their job. I mean the really deep

technical resources they obviously need to have those skillsets but as a TAM at [company name B removed]. So what I did at [Company name B Removed] was ITIL training and really more or less some training and service delivery methodology and Cloud stuff really focused on Azure and Office 365 at [Company name B Removed].

You've done plenty of different learning with your bachelor's degree, with ITIL and with [Company name A removed], so what way do you feel you learn the best. What sort of method works for you, is it lectures or is it something else. What works best for you, how do you learn?

I learn best if I have anyone who can explain to me something and afterwards I can practice it, a hands on lab or something. For me that's the best way to learn something. The problem with other learning stuff like reading or so is I read stuff and then it's clear for me but if I turn the page I already forgot it. It's not that I didn't understand it, I don't remember it that good. So normally when I have to learn something I try to understand it and then explain it to someone. I try to learn it in a course, then use it and explain it to someone. If I see that the other person understands what I tell them then I see that I have understood it.

Have you ever gone through any training that has done that for you, any specific program that has done that for you? Given you the chance for someone to explain it to you, given you the chance to test it outside the training?

Actually yes. At [Company name B removed] we did workshops for our customers where we as TAMs could participate and they were always a theoretical part and then hands on labs. If you have to introduce SCCM 2012 or SCOM then you had a lesson with slides, PowerPoint with a teacher and then a hands on lab and if you had questions you could ask the teacher. And afterwards on my job I've seen if I had to talk with a customer on it if I understood it or not, or where I have some gaps.

If we did some sort of workshop style which was monitored by a coach that would probably work best for you in the future.

Yes definitely.

Looking at the champions program as it has been so far, what have you liked about the program? There has been the training bundles, the coaching, the workbooks and the evaluation itself. What have you used and what have you liked and not liked?

I probably had the best experience with the coaching sessions and the workbooks. The coaching sessions you explained the stuff and if there was a question I could ask and then with the workbooks that for me like the explanation. I had to think about it again and if I didn't know an answer I had to look it up. So it wasn't only that I read it on a page or seen it on a screen. The thing that I would change is the modules. There is 10 or 15 talking points on it and I understand them all, that is not a problem but when I click next I already forgot what was on the last slide. So I don't know if you can do it, or if it would be possible just for example in networking, to record a video where someone has a switch and explain it on a switch so you can see the switch and show the device. That switch is a 24 port switch so the naming convention says there that it is 24.

You said to me that with the workbooks that if you didn't understand something you would look it up. Where was your primary place to go for looking up an answer?

Google or if I couldn't find it, for example I had and sometimes still have some problems with the naming conventions. For instance there is no or I couldn't find anywhere, where the networking naming conventions are explained. So I asked to my fellow TAM who was a TSP before, so he was selling these stuff so he knew it.

For me the best way to learn is if I have to work for it. It sounds a little bit silly but there are people who can read something and then they know it. Unfortunately I am not one of them. If someone tells anything to me, it makes sense and I think I remember it longer than if I read it but still it doesn't last as long is if I have to work for it on my own.

So what I am taking from this and the moment, if we did the next level of the champions program, we gave you the stuff to read because we have to set some sort of baseline of knowing, then we did a workshop where we gave you clues and you had to work for the answers during the workshop but it was guided by a coach, then we sent you off to do a practical project to test your knowledge that would be something that you would use day to day so it would apply to your job.

That would be great, even the knowledge checks in the modules were great too, so there could be more. I think there were only 2 or 3 checks in every module and the other thing is that you can retry them any time you want. You try it once or twice and if you don't get it then you know it by heart. I mean you see the answers and next time I have to click this button, then this button then that button.

That was the whole point of the overall verbal evaluation at the end to get your qualification because previously it was just the buttons that were getting you the qualification. People were just passing the answers around or just test test test ok I've passed the course no problem.

The verbal evaluation is the greatest thing I guess. It sets some kind of pressure so that people really have a look into the topic. Honestly I am quite a lazy person, in my opinion mankind is lazy. If you are just doing the click thing, we have done that at [Company name B removed], we doing maybe here as well, we make screenshots, send them to your colleagues and if they are answering the questions they have the screenshots of the answers, it's done and they haven't learned anything at all.

That’s ok for the standard stuff like diversity training, not that diversity is not important but honestly anyone with some kind of common sense passes these tests anyway.

If there was one thing you would change, only one thing to change, what would be the primary thing you would change?

The modules, I would make the modules more interactive. That would be the first thing that we would change. Maybe more that people had to answer more knowledge check questions. There was one very good one in the storage part where there were 5 different sections and you had to match which naming part to the description. I thought this was very useful during the module not as a question at the end. You had the slide and then 2 or 3 slides later you had the knowledge check question. I thought this was very good.

Appendix 3 – Interview 2:

F = Facilitator

P = Participant

Date: 12th June 2015

What helps you learn the best way? How do you learn best? Have you been through a specific training that you have really enjoyed or has something stayed with you that you have that's exactly how you learn or that's how you do it best?

Maybe I'm just in [Company name A removed] too long but I do believe the 70, 20 10 rule does work. Doing it, mentorship and training in that order. So yeah, that's my preferred method, yes.

If you were to do any of the classes you have been to, have any of them been really good or really bad in the training side of things?

See, I've done courses, for instance the last one was a VMware course. It was a Hyper-V course actually. We spend 2 days learning how to cluster in Hyper-V but since that day I haven't touched Hyper-V. And before I only had a little bit of exposure to it. So training is all about needing to use it after, and even before it so that you have the hunger and then implementing it and use it thereafter.

So it really has to apply to the job, if it doesn't apply to the job you are never going to remember it or use it?

Yeah and the trainers, yes there is a varying degree in trainings, but most of the trainers in [Company Name A Removed] I have come across are very proficient and good.

So you say some of the trainers are good and bad. What is it about good trainers do you think, what makes a good trainer? What is it you remember or what do they do that make you interested?

Well if they are prepared, they know the material, they are able to bring their own personality into it or bring something new to the party so that it doesn't become mundane. I think learning is supposed to be kind of challenging and if you are just being spoon fed new information in a boring fashion it doesn't help, so an imaginative trainer, a prepared trainer, organised is good yeah.

So moving on to the Champions 100 technical part that you have already been through already. There were various parts of that, there was training bundles, there was the evaluation, there was coaching and workbooks. What of those things did you use. Did you use of those, the workbooks and the training bundles?

Yeah I used them all.

And what did you think of them. What did you like or not like about them?

Well the core training, the online training. It was very good. It presented a lot of information that was, you know, it was presented clearly and it was good information. Some of it was out of date but I think you know about that. Once you got through that, that was the core information fed into you. So I thought some of the courses were presented well, in that they put context around the information. Then the mentoring sessions, they were good because it allowed you to dig into different angles of where there was gaps in your knowledge and the coaches were able to fill in them. It was good it was a nice open environment. Workbooks I don't really remember that much.

The workbooks were the ones that just presented just a question to you and whether you could answer it or not.

Oh yeah, so just test your knowledge. Yeah, that's good yeah.

And the last thing, the evaluation itself. I think we did evaluations slightly different than you would normally expect in [Company Name A Removed], by putting it in a scenario and making it verbal. Did you like that setup or would you do it differently. How would you do things if you were given a magic wand to do evaluations a different way. How would you do it?

I think you have to fail it to understand the limitations. The fact that I passed it first go didn't allow me to challenge it in any way. I thought it was great that the interviewer could delve in different directions and led it quite strong. They were able to evaluate pretty clearly how much the employee knew, but you understand more by failing it than you would by passing it.

Do you think you have come out of the Champions program having learned something or do you think we could have done it differently or put something else in there and you would have learned something more or something different?

Yeah I definitely learning something. It pushed us through a process that we had to absorb x amount of technical information and yes it was a good program and it brought everybody to a standard which you can leverage thereafter. So I understand the rationale for it and yes it did achieve its goal.

And you said at the start that training has to match what you are doing on the job. Is the Champions program, the technical part, relevant to your job at the moment or do you think it will be relevant to your job?

The TAM job is very varied and it requires a broad level of knowledge to be able to interact with all your customers. So there's parts of it you won't touch again, or maybe never touch again and other parts that you'll find very relevant. We haven't been segmented into any sort of group like the RMs,

knowledge groups. It's a baseline standard, apart from some of the out of date information that was provided in some of the training, it was all very relevant and required yes.

So just one last question. If you were to turn around and I was to say to you that we were going to do something completely different for the next level of the Champions Program. We are not going to do the verbal evaluation the way we did it, we are not going to do the coaching the way we did it. What would you design, how would you design it for everybody to learn in the best way?

I would, I think first of all it is a good approach, the best that we have seen to date. I think I would include mentoring with SC sales, Pre-sales, because that is where the TAM job is going. More direct alignment with Sales, and that could be done through sharing meetings. If the TAM is going on site, make sure it is collaborated with the SC so that any opportunities are raised and if they SC is going to be presenting the storage portfolio that the TAM gets the see the storage portfolio being presented and the customer interactions and see how to lead the questions. I think that would strongly develop the TAM. I've been in that situation when I was in the Irish business unit. That's the 20 percent, you're on the job, you're learning, you're interacting, you're seeing how the customer reacts to the different information being presented and how it's being taken from conceptual, from the slides, into their environment and how they can relate it back to their business needs. So that would be a great step forward for TAM.s Apart from that I do like the training format, but the mentoring side needs to be brought more into the real world.

Ok, so that's it. Is there anything more you would add or anything you would like to say?

No that's good. It's a good program.

Appendix 4 – Interview 3:

F = Facilitator

P = Participant

Date: 15th June 2015

What previous training have you gone through that you liked and what did you like about it?

I suppose recently it's probably easier to talk about training that I haven't liked. I think a lot of the training we've done has all kind of been geared towards online, and I can understand with Opex restrictions recently that's the most cost efficient way to deliver training. But because the types of training we're doing, if it's technical training. It's not very easy to sit down to go through slide after slide on your own. That I find quite difficult. Training that I have gone through that I've liked would be more interactive or classroom based. Or even if it's not classroom based Adobe Connect where it's more of an interactive session. Something like that I find that's a much easier method of learning than just spending time on your own going through slides, you know.

So the idea of just sitting monotonous, read this remember it, read this remember it, doesn't work for you.

Exactly yeah.

So if it was an interactive training course, has there been an interactive training course you have been on and what are the things that make it interactive for you? What are the things that stay with you?

I think when you have interaction with the trainer and you're given real life examples. So it's something that you're learning and it's applied to real life situations for your customers and things like that. That's the type of thing that would stay with me, rather than just slides after slides of things where it may not be applicable to you. I think for me key to you retaining the information, particularly if its technical training, is having continuity and that's one thing that I have fed back about the Champions 100. I think it's an amazing

program. I think it's been really positive, mainly positive but I just don't think there's the continuity there. My fear is that you'd go from Champions 100 then there's a gap and you're expected to do Champions 200. So if there was an interactive session offered once a month or even once a quarter so that you can keep the information refreshed. If you're not using it on a frequent basis you are going to lose the information, you know.

So going back to the Champions program. Continuity is an important part of that. What is your experience of the champions program itself? What have you liked about the champions program so far?

For me the highlight was, and I did all the coaching sessions that were available to me, I know some of my colleagues didn't, and I've been promoting it within my team. In fact within my team now, what I've started doing is, we're hosting sessions with just our team, so kind of a study group to help the people that haven't gone through the evaluation to kind of get them up to speed and share our learnings and share our experience of the process. The part that I least liked was at the very beginning when we had to do the online study and then you did those 93 questions, or was it something along those lines. That was my least favourite parts. I found the workbooks really good but again there was such a wide scope of information within those. I know I certainly I had to do a lot of work every evening to prepare for the evaluation and a colleague mine took a whole week of annual leave to go and get themselves up to speed for the evaluation. So the workbooks were really good but it would be great to have somebody assigned to take you through those as well, you know.

What were the ones you liked the best. You liked the workbooks. What did you think of the coaching sessions? Did they work for you or did you use them in conjunction with the workbooks?

Yeah yeah, I thought the coaching sessions were really really good. I felt I was quite lucky because it was nearly always a one to one type session I was on with the coaching. So while you might be put on the spot and asked questions and things like that, it was really interactive. You could kind of

focus the training on where your weak points were, and things like that. Again there were a lot of real life situations that were used, so when it's applied to your day to day role I think it's easier to retain the information that way, you know. Maybe if I had any criticism I'd say the topics were so big that half an hour is not very long enough to explore everything.

Ok, the 2nd last question I have. On the evaluation itself. What did you like about the evaluation or not like about the evaluation itself?
I didn't like the way that it started with the scenario diagram type thing. And that something that wasn't included in our training. As in it's not something you can go on the internet and practice, it wasn't included in the online training, it wasn't included in the workbooks, so the first time you're seeing that is in the evaluation. So I didn't find that was a comfortable lead into the whole the rest of the evaluation. So that would be my low point I suppose. The highlight of the evaluation was I liked the way it was carried out over Adobe Connect with the cameras enabled and things like that. It made you feel like you know a more interactive and comfortable type session. And I suppose as well, you know, I did mine with Dave and he did try and make you feel comfortable and help you, guide you, where possible. You know so, that would kind of be my highlight of how the process worked for me.

So my last question then. If you could throw away the book and start again with the Champions program, what would you do, or what would you change? What would be the one thing you do better?

I'd probably would just not have done the online training that we had to do through my Learning. And I would have just focused on the workbooks and the coaching sessions. And in fact I had a meeting call with call Sallia Bandy there last week, and one of the points I raised was the lack of continuity with the program. So she did say that the coaching is not just designed to bring you through the evaluation but that it's designed for continuity. So I'm going to try and once a quarter to go through the various coaching sessions available, just to keep refreshed and so that I don't lose all the information ahead of the Champions 200.

Appendix 5 – Interview 4:

F = Facilitator
P = Participant
Date: 24th July 2015

** A recording error resulted in the first minute to two minutes of the interview not to being recorded.

So when you're talking about the course work, which bits did you like the most? The training itself I understand because we repurposed technical training because we didn't have time to develop it ourselves.
Some existing technical training, yes. And that's probably a, it got everyone panicking about nothing. And I think, because their saying aw shit I've got to learn all this stuff, but this is I'd ask a tech this, I wouldn't ask it myself, answer it myself. Particularly amongst the guys that have been there a long time, that have done the job for a long time. They're so long out of the technical ranks that they've forgotten most of this stuff. They understand the principles, and they've always understood the principals. It's the, you know this goes with, that's probably not the right word, um…. It's the details that they don't know and they didn't need. And they didn't know they didn't need it if you know what I mean.

They were told stuff that looked really complex, and they thought they needed that complexity and they didn't, they just needed an understanding of it.
Yeah

So what did you think of the evaluation and the level we put the evaluation at?
The evaluation was fine, it's perfect for the TAMs and things like that. Whether you'd actually…. what the next level would be I don't know. I mean, a lot of the questions were… the problem with testing TAMs is a lot of the skills are undefinable. Its how do you deal with an escalation, unless you run

a dummy escalation, you won't understand whether they're, if someone is good at an escalation or not.

One of the options that has been mooted is a workshop rather than evaluation per say. How do you think that might work if we got a group or people together into a workshop and we did maybe a dummy escalations or dummy situations/scenarios.

That would probably work. The only problem is you will get one or two strong individuals that will overpower the group, so what you want to do is probably have some guys that have been around by the, if you can grade it by the length of time they have been in the job or length of time they have had experience in a similar role. Because I can see, someone like [individual name removed], put him and I in the same group. And I don't mean.... I'm naturally going to try and take over because, hold on, I know how to do this one. And he won't get the benefit out of it, or he won't see. It's just experience is going to win 9 times out of 10.

The question is then, what do we mean by win? The inexperienced person is going learn from it then because they are in the same group as you.

Yeah but are we trying to test something or are we trying to teach something, they are two very different things.

Yeah and what we are looking to do is, we are trying to both. Teach and see what people have picked up and learned from it. The Champions program is all about development, and even the evaluation itself, I know you flew through the evaluation, you had no problem with it. But we have had others that have done the evaluation a number of times, and each time they do it they learn from it, and they know where their weaknesses are. The feedback then is what they learn from. They are weak in say the networking or storage area and they know they need to develop that area of their skillset. That is the concept of the evaluation, it's not a test.

Ok well maybe if groups, I'd say if you're going to do groups, you are going to have to break down several scenarios. And say ok, this customer had this and this and this happen. It's very much like, I used to do a lot of interviews and one of the things we used to do in the interviews is give them impossible questions where there is no such thing as a right answer. It's understanding, how they approach things. I think I've still got some questions…. just bear with me a second. Oh, it's the same questions that we use for all the interviews, I remember because I wrote them a while back. So they're now it's the default standard, but the idea is not what they say, it's how they think.

You're testing competency rather than knowledge.
Yep. You know like, customers system is broke, why is the customers system broken? It's broken because they haven't done firmware updates. OK, so how do we talk to them about firmware updates? So it's that sort of a chain of things.

So one of the things obviously then is you have to relate it to on the job.
Yeah.

We've had conversations with people before and they've always said look if you don't relate it to what we do on the job, there's no point.
Yeah, and the other problem is, if you do it on a particular scenario, the others would hear about the scenario and learn very quickly. Actually, unless you could knick the old Kepner and Tregoe stuff.

The square doughnuts? I think they've gone around too often that I everybody knows them at this stage.
Yeah, I know but I'm sure that there's other ones that are not necessarily Kepner and Tregoe but that was an ideal thinking thing. You know they have the same process, where they have a problem and then you ask the questions directly to the instructor by writing them down and he will respond. Rather than open outcry sort of thing.

And do you think the TAMs would learn best with that scenario or do you think we should do a teaching thing and then do the workshops as a separate thing?
I'd say do a teaching thing. Get them to understand that they've gotta think about ways through a problem. What a TAM does is problem solve, whether that problem solving based on engineering or based on um… customer problems. Its understanding what the root cause of the problem is. It may be a sales problem, it may be an ordering problem. That's what the TAM needs to understand and try and take steps to resolve.

I suppose the other thing I think the TAM needs to do is know what tools they need to draw on to solve that particular problem. If you don't know the tools, so obviously there is a teaching bit and we have to teach the tools. So that people know what they are and then put them in a scenario and say this happened so what tools would you use? And how would you use them and why would you use those particular tools.
Yeah. It depends on which tools you are talking about. Are you talking about system management or are we talking customer management, because I think customer management is more important than system management.

It's kind of a combination between them all. An example might be a customer complains that it's so hard to do firmware updates, and that's the problem so now how do you tackle it. The TAM obviously number 1 spot that that is the problem, they need to identify the problem that the customer may not even tell you because they deal with it themselves. Two they have the conversation and manage the customer with that problem and then know how [Company Name Removed] can fix that.
Assuming they can fix it. I mean the classic one of those is one of the secure companies, something like the military or something like that, you can't use all this stuff that we are trying to push

Like support Assist and you run into real problems with that.

Which is not deployable because of the sensitive nature. That's actually probably a nice little scenario, how would you deal with that has this problem. If you ever find anyone that can answer it, bottle it.

Is there anything else you would give feedback on the Champions program as it is or what you would change or any other thoughts you might have?

The bit that [name removed] did in the team meeting the other day, about a week and a half ago whenever it was, ideal. I think if they said that that's your training. Mind you it was predominantly around networks but if he'd had done that and say another hour on the other stuff and that was your training. That would be a lot better than wading through those courses with the awful American accents and everything else that's associated with that.

The one that [name removed] did was something that we developed in house as opposed to something that was done in Educate [Company Name A Removed].

The [name removed] is a lot better and stuff more like that will work well.

Perfect, that's the coaching and if you sign up for coaching that's what we go through. We developed those ourselves and we will have coaching of that nature again for the next stage.

That would have been ideal, if you had just done one or two of those, people would have passed first time, I believe anyhow. It would identify and then you'd have the remainder you could put a training process in place for the remainder. I don't mean that in the sense of failed, I mean that in the sense of development.

Appendix 6 – Interview 5:

F = Facilitator
P = Participant
Date: 5th August 2015

Outside of the champions program, what way do you feel you learn best? How do you feel you best pick up information?
Ehhh. Well a combination of ways. What I typically use is primarily self-study. So via, either books or even better online, that type of learning. I am also doing a masters, an executive MBA myself so it is partially online format. So tend to prefer eLearnings with regular progress checks and with references bundled into the learning activities. Self-study on books as well works very well for me. That's the way for example I typically prepare for Cisco exams because CCIA certified so I need to recertify every 2 years. Classroom training, it really depends. To me, it adds a lot of value if it is more hands on, so experience related if you will rather than the typical classroom environment.

You talked about the fact that you are doing an MBA at the moment and you do Cisco training, what is it about those training courses and those online materials that keep you interested in it? What keeps you going through it?

Well I mean, for the Cisco part it's really not online, it's mostly self-study on books and exam simulations, ok. So that's very traditional if you will. On the MBA what they do is very similar to the Champions program actually because you have a part with a recorded lesson by a teacher and the lessons they have, for example the lesson is about 30 minutes and it's divided into 3 parts, and you basically have at the end of each part you have a short quiz where you can check your understanding about the previous one. Which is very good by the way, and they blend this with live sessions. Similar to what we did with the course where you have the teacher sitting on

the live session. You are sitting on a virtual room together with your peers. And in those lessons, typically a practical case is discussed. So the teacher maybe gives it beforehand, sometimes we discuss it at the end of the lesson. The teacher gives a couple of hints on how to develop the case then we work in groups, so virtual groups of four, with three or four people. We discuss and we do the micro assignment for the case discussion, then we convene all together again to discuss the results of the various groups and take out learnings from them. And this second part I have seen it is very effective to, you know, put concepts in practice, if you will, and discuss with your peers.

Excellent, and do you find the group learning or the individual learning, do you like that more? Which do you prefer to do, do you like to work on your own or do you like the work in the groups, or is it a combination of both?

It is a combination. Basically what I prefer is to do an initial step of individual learning to bring myself to a level that would allow me then to get into a group discussion. Especially if it is on a topic that I have never seen before. I typically prefer to, you know, do my homework first, get some basic preparation and then with that preparation get into a group discussion. So it's like a 2 step type of thing.

That sounds very good. And then moving on to the Champions program itself. What did you think of the Champions program all together?

Like I think for me, it was very beneficial because it allowed me to get an understanding about not only the products but at least a basic understanding of technology areas on which I wasn't completely confident on. For me primarily, I mean the main one was storage for me, because I am coming from an IP networking background so campus network and wide area networks and not really matching to data centre. So for me it was very very beneficial to get some basics about those technologies and of course the product knowledge because I didn't really have that before. So that is what I appreciated the most. I got a level of understanding about those offerings,

especially certain technology areas where I am not confident on, that I didn't have before.

Ok cool. And the materials that we used in the Champions program. What ones suited you best or what ones did you use? Did you use the coaching, the workbooks…?

I used all of them actually, because I did the trainings, I completed the workbooks and I did the coaching lessons in this sequence. So I first did the eLearning, then I tried to work on the workbooks and provided answers by myself and then I went on the coaching. And I found this particular sequence quite effective because by doing the eLearnings it allowed me to do most of the workbooks. There were certain questions in the workbooks that weren't covered in the eLearnings so I had to, you know, do some research by myself on Wikipedia or the internet. Which is fine, there is no problem with that. And by doing the workbooks, some questions came out that I could ask on the coaching sessions. So I found that this particular sequence worked very well.

Ok, excellent. And the evaluation itself, I am sure you have done plenty of tests in your time with the Cisco exams and with the MBA, what did you think of the Champions evaluation by comparison to what you've done before? What did you think of it and would you change it in any way?

No actually no. I mean I think it was perfect for the level that is required. I mean it was a very broad discussion at a high level which is what is required from a technology knowledge standpoint. What I reckon is that you know the discussion of the environment. If I put myself in the shoes of someone who doesn't really have a technology background that could have been quite challenging to be honest. You know starting off from that one, because you know in the particular scenario that I got which like a typical you know campus plus data centre in a hospital. For me it was particularly easy because it is an environment that I have seen in a few customers that I have worked with in my previous work, in my previous job because I was working with some hospitals. I have seen that specific infrastructure before, so I could

describe it very very well and I was quite confident on that. I could imagine that somebody that doesn't have, you know, a very technical background could be challenged by starting off with that type of discussion. Because you know, it was really an architecture type of discussion, and I think that wasn't really covered a lot in the materials that I have seen. So maybe if I think about what is missing on the various units, probably something about general architecture? So how a typical network architecture or data centre architecture is structured, because there is something in the network part but it's very very high level and it's treated very quickly. And since in the evaluation we spent about half of the time discussing, you know, the reference architecture at the beginning, probably some more materials and training on that area would help, so how a typical data centre architecture is made, how a typical campus network is made, what are the architecture trends today? You know, layer 2 aggregation and concentration of traditional core architecture, leaf spine architecture. So these type of options that are in the market at the moment. That I think would be beneficial.

Yep, that makes perfect sense. So the very last thing, the next stage of the Champions program is going to start looking at the tools and the different offerings available to our customers. If you were going to design a program that was going to teach that, would you follow the same template, or would you do something different? If you were to start from scratch, how would you look at it?

So you mean for the Champions 100, for this training that I have just done?

So the training that you have just done was all about the hardware, the next stage of the Champions is still Champions 100, but we are looking at all the tools like the DSET, Lasso, all the different warranties that we have available like PSP and PS for Data Centre and we will be looking at the different websites that we use like Oracle KB and Salesforce.com. So all of those are going to be included in the next stage of the Champions program. If you were to go and do a course to first of all educate on that, and secondly evaluate that. How would you

structure it? Would you structure it the same way that we did the technical part or would you do it completely different?

I would probably do it, it really depends I think on the type of knowledge which is required by the TAMs. If the objective is to give the TAMs the knowledge of the tools and what they can do, and the basics of those tools, I would probably do it on a modular way. You know, like on a tool by tool basis, like saying, I don't know tool…. for example OME. What is it for, what the customer can use it for, what the main features are? Some hands on, but more from the user perspective. So what the user can do, what type of information you can get, how do you get it, what type of reports you can get,, how do you get them etc. etc. etc.

If it is a tool for support for example, what is the tool, what does support use it for, how does the customer use it? So I would tackle it from the customer perspective. So then I would probably do a further level down, maybe level 200, which goes more on the bits and bytes on how you install and configure the tools. So from a support point of view if you will. So how you install it in detail, how you set it up in detail, how you troubleshoot it for example, things like that.

So how would you evaluate the knowledge?

Well on the evaluation of the knowledge, maybe I could say, so I could could try to approach it on a customer scenario type of discussion. So for example, the customer has a need to monitor his network or monitor his servers with a certain frequency and to get a certain type of information. What tool would you use, how would you configure it and which machines would you configure it? What type of information would you take out of the tool, what type of reports would you suggest the customer to create. This type of thing.

Appendix 7 – Informed Consent Form:

Consent for Participation in Interview Research

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Darren Walsh from The National College of Ireland. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about the Champions Program. I will be one of approximately 5 people being interviewed for this research.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, no one on my organisation will be told.

2. I understand that most interviewees in will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.

3. Participation involves being interviewed by Darren Walsh from The National College of Ireland. The interview will last approximately 30 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made. If I don't want to be taped, I will not be able to participate in the study.

4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me or my organisation by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.

5. Employees from my organisation will neither be present at the interview nor have access to raw notes or transcripts. This precaution will prevent my individual comments from having any negative repercussions.

6. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by The National College of Ireland.

7. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

8. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

_____	_____
My Signature	Date
_____	_____
Darren Walsh	Date

For further information, please contact:

Darren Walsh
Phone: 087-xxxxxxx
E-Mail: Darren.Walsh51@gmail.com

Appendix 8 – Submission of Thesis to Norma Smurfit Library, National College of Ireland

Student name: Darren Walsh

Student number: 99369931

School: National College of Ireland

Course: Msc. Management

Degree to be awarded: Masters in Management

Title of Thesis: Developing and improving on the training methods used to technically upskill a multi-regional technical account management team at a multi-national IT company

One hard bound copy of your thesis will be lodged in the Norma Smurfit Library and will be available for consultation. The electronic copy will be accessible in TRAP (http://trap.ncirl.ie/), the National College of Ireland's Institutional Repository. In accordance with normal academic library practice all theses lodged in the National College of Ireland Institutional Repository (TRAP) are made available on open access.

I agree to a hard bound copy of my thesis being available for consultation in the library. I also agree to an electronic copy of my thesis being made publicly available on the National College of Ireland's Institutional Repository TRAP.

Signature of Candidate: _____

For completion by the School:

The aforementioned thesis was received by_____

Date: _____

This signed form must be appended to all hard bound and electronic copies of your thesis submitted to your school