

Unravelling aspects of the Frontline Management Initiative

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The last two decades have witnessed a number of initiatives in vocational education and training aimed at developing more flexible systems of learning offering greater choice to employers and, more arguably, employees, in relation to the what, how and where of learning. The Frontline Management Initiative (FMI) is one such initiative. A competence-based management development strategy, the FMI places learning within an organisation. It could be considered a critical site for cultivating ideas of lifelong learning and translating these ideas into practice. Drawing on data collected as part of a national evaluation study, this paper explores the contribution of the FMI to the practice of management learning in selected enterprises. Various discourses of management and learning are presented as background to this exploration. The argument is made that, through the FMI, frontline managers not only learn to manage by means of acquiring or demonstrating competencies, but also to become particular types of manager. The FMI operates as a 'seductive text' where management learning is learning to manage in a particular way. The growth of the 'self-managing' manager extends the reach of management whilst limiting the scope of learning, or, at least, particular kinds of learning. My primary concern in this paper is with how these displaced kinds of learning might find their place in future forms of the FMI.