

John Wilson: You asked me what can managers do to encourage learning and creativity of their staff. Well, of course, there are many things they can do, for example, they can model learning themselves in the sense of identifying issues in the workplace that are of concern to them, and bringing them to the notice of colleagues and inviting them to consider and suggest ways of addressing them. And they can encourage employees to do similar things in respect of their own work.

They can also create a climate of learning, so that people feel that learning is something that they should be always engaged in, such as asking staff about how they are progressing and follow-up to an appraisal report and recommendations that have been made there. And they can also provide resources, physical and human, to staff that will support their learning and raise their curiosity.

I know a Thai travel agent, for example, who distributes brochures of the holiday destinations that his company promotes for staff to browse through and get ideas from.

But whatever initiative is taken depends very much on the work situation and the level of work that the staff and the unit is engaged in. There's no single way of promoting learning, it depends on the situation.

But mentioning situations reminds me that any new manager or even any consultant entering a new situation has to undertake some kind of situational analysis of the needs of the employees and workers in that situation. One cannot go on the reports written by former bosses or informal talk about what the situation is, one needs to go and look for oneself.

And I can illustrate this from a project I was involved in in Bangladesh in the mid-1990s, when we were introducing teacher training for teachers of higher secondary education, teachers of college grades 11 to 12 in most secondary school systems.

And the teachers were college professors of mathematics and Islamic studies who had been seconded to be teacher trainers, and had gone through a three month training programme that consisted mainly of listening to lectures on the history and philosophy of Bangladesh education. But they were never actually involved in teacher education when I visited them, because the college intakes were of only two subjects per year, so they had to wait for two or three years for their subject to come round, and so they were very frustrated and despondent and resentful.

So the first thing that we had to do was to identify a way of engaging those staff in the training process, and also we found that they had very negative attitudes towards training, they didn't really believe it

was all that necessary since they'd been successful teachers themselves without training. So we had to help them to see that there were skills involved in teaching and in supervising teaching, and that this was what they had to acquire to do their job effectively.