

CONTEXT: LESSONS ON BLENDED LEARNING

Workshops, coaching, buddy groups, on-line learning, line manager engagement, action planning, learning projects and a graduation event - all this is part of the Context programme! In this blended learning programme that is targeting humanitarian professionals, what ‘works’? And what do the participants find most beneficial?

What is Context?

The Context Programme is a comprehensive humanitarian staff development programme, which consists of two streams; a Management and Leadership programme (9 months) and a Core Humanitarian Skills programme (6 months). The aim of the Context programme is to strengthen the capacity of national staff to lead in effective disaster response. The Context programme includes all the above mentioned capacity building techniques which are designed to reinforce each other, as explained in more detail in the [Context Programme Guide](#). RedR UK is implementing Context in Jordan, Lebanon, Kenya and Ethiopia, with support from Oxfam, as part of the Talent Development programme.¹

What do participants value most?

The end of programme evaluation by 59 of the 149 participants from the first 8 cohorts² that took place in Jordan and Kenya showed that all components were found moderately to extremely beneficial by the vast majority of participants.

The components that the participants most often quoted as ‘extremely beneficial’ were the two face to face workshops. In the M&L programme also the learning project participants worked on over the course of the programme were found equally beneficial³. Over 79% of participants also reported working on their action plans, coaching, the graduation event and networking with other participants to be ‘very’ to ‘extremely’ beneficial.

On the other hand, there were very mixed reviews amongst participants regarding the benefit of the support from the line manager, the complementary self-directed on-line

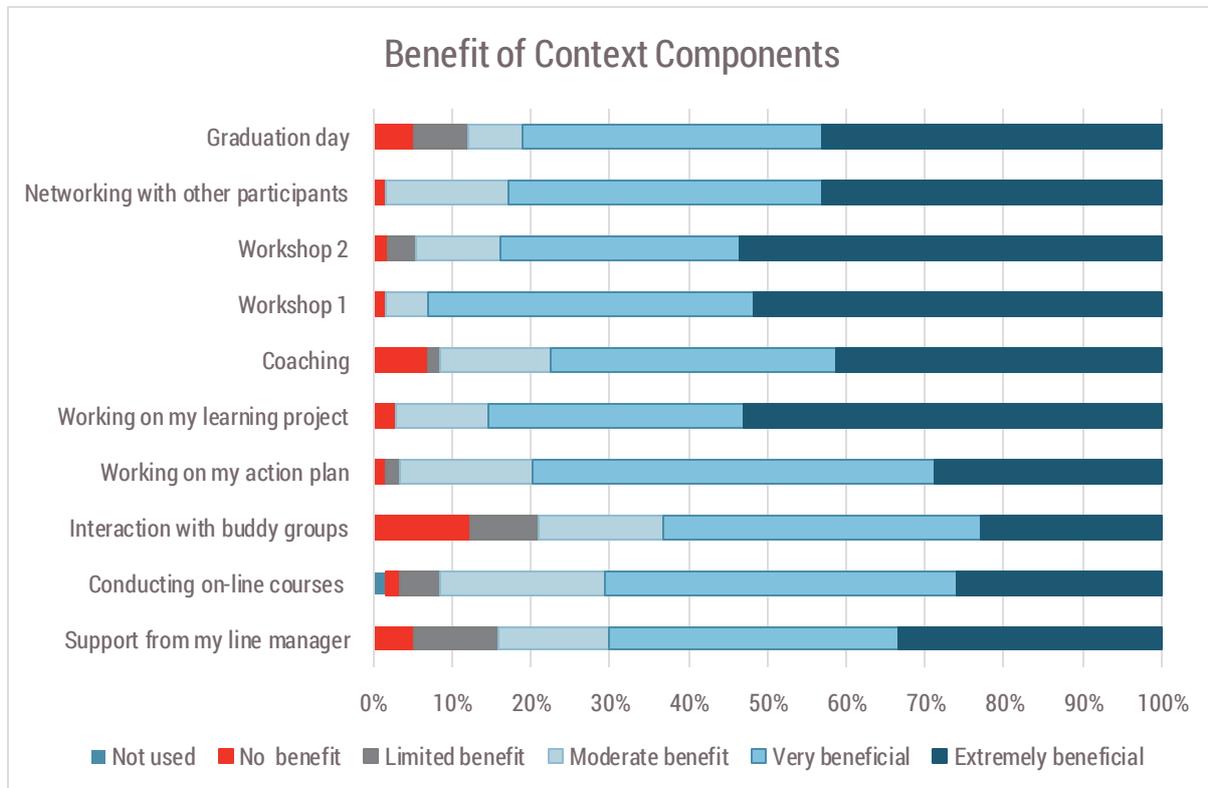
¹ Within the same programme, MzN is implementing Context in Bangladesh, and Bioforce in DRC. CSH Alliance is responsible for managing the coaching component of the M&L programme.

² Response rate of 40%.

³ The Learning Project was only part of the Management and Leadership programme, not the Core Skills programme.

courses and the buddy groups. Some participants found these components ‘extremely beneficial’, while others found they have ‘no or limited benefit’.

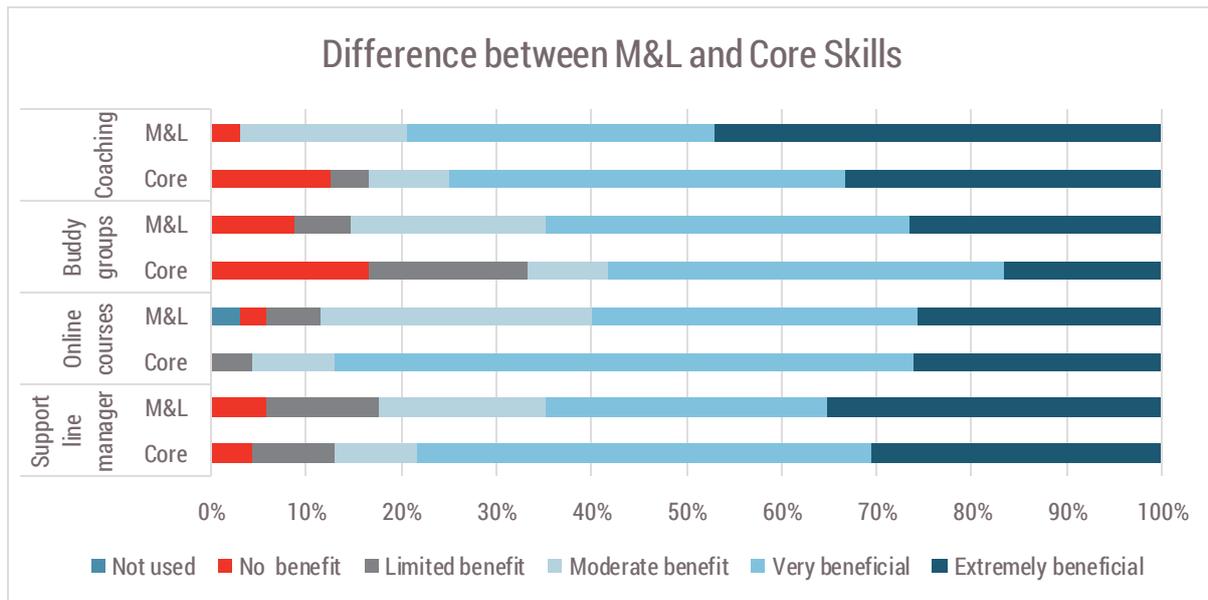
Graph 1: Relative Benefits of Context Components reported by participants



Differences between Management and Leadership & Core Skills programme

The feedback follows a similar pattern, and both groups are most positive about the two workshops. However, there are also some interesting differences. M&L participants were more enthusiastic about the benefit of the programme components, more often rating something as ‘extremely beneficial’ (42% vs 34%). However, when looking at specific components, it shows that Core skills participants were more positive about conducting self-directed online courses (87% vs 60% very or extremely beneficial), and about the support from their line manager (78% vs 65% very or extremely beneficial). On the other hand, they had a larger portion of Core participants (35% vs 15%) that found the buddy groups of no or limited value. Regarding coaching, while both groups were positive, amongst the M&L participants 47% found this ‘extremely beneficial’, compared to 37% of the Core skills participants.

Graph 2: Relative Benefits of Context Components reported by participants



Managing a blended learning programme

From a programme management perspective, running such a multi-faceted capacity-building programme is time intensive, and requires frequent engagement with the participants, coaches and line managers over the course of the 6-9 months and monitoring of these activities. Inevitably, choices have to be made on where to put the emphasis in order to effectively meet the objective of the programme, namely that participants put the humanitarian competencies learned into practice and make changes in their work. Below are some of our lessons learned in managing this.

Key lessons learned

- It is useful to focus the attention of the participants on the **final assignment** of the programme, which is a reflection on what they have learned and what they have implemented. The various components, like coaching, action planning and buddy groups, then can all support the participant to achieve this. Some components work better for some participants than others, and its useful to have these various mechanisms for learning and support available.
- **Line managers** can be key allies in encouraging learning and the implementation of the learning in practice, but at times themselves do not display the behaviours and competencies that are taught in the course and/or do not provide participants with the support needed, particularly when more senior participants are concerned.
- **Coaching** is found to be very beneficial by the participants, despite the great logistical challenges experienced in matching coaches to coachees and in making the sessions actually take place. The higher rating of coaching amongst M&L participants may be due to the cascade model whereby they

were coached by externally trained coaches, while Core skills participants were coached by M&L participants, with delays in the first having a knock-on effect on the second as well as the general limitations of 'cascading'.

- **Buddy groups** have achieved impressive results when participants are motivated and commit the time and effort to it, others have not been actively engaged. Buddy groups with participants in the same geographic area were more active. Having a shared objective to be achieved by the end of the programme like a joint learning project could help in activating the role of buddy groups. A part of the M&L participants make their learning projects into joint projects, which may partly explain why they benefited more from these buddy groups.
- **On-line courses:** Across cohorts, internet access was a challenge for participants working in remote locations, particularly in Ethiopia and Kenya. The self-directed online courses are more appreciated by Core Skills participants, and typically have been on topics like Sphere Standards. This may be due to Core skills participants being new to the humanitarian sector and particularly keen to enhance their knowledge of the sector, while M&L participants are more geared towards learning soft skills which are addressed more in the other components of Context.

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