Rising expectations and the drive towards modernisation and responsiveness demand rapid change in public services – adult and community learning (ACL) provision is no exception. How can ACL staff use leadership to win the hearts and minds of their colleagues and encourage them to respond positively and proactively to the changing policies and priorities that impact on their work? This guide explores leadership and management of change in local authority ACL.

The guide:
- considers how change for quality improvement in ACL can best be led
- identifies drivers for change in the learning and skills sector
- illustrates organisational responses to change with 14 case studies
- draws on research and theory to develop understanding of change issues
- highlights factors that can help organisations and individuals respond positively to change.

The exploration of change leadership is located in the practical experience of managers charged with raising quality. Staff with a variety of roles will find it useful as they seek to maximise the benefits of change for individuals and for their organisation.

Kate Watters, Anne Armstrong and Annie Merton
The Adult and Community Learning Quality Support Programme is a 3-year programme to support ACL providers to meet quality requirements of inspection and funding agencies and improve their provision. It is run by the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) in partnership with the National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) and was originally funded for 3 years by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and is now funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Details of the programme, extra copies of this guide and back-up materials are available on the website www.qualityACL.org.uk.

These guides are currently available:

- The alchemy of learning: impact and progression in adult learning
- Curriculum leadership in adult learning
- Equality and diversity in adult and community learning: a guide for managers
- Fit for purpose: self-assessment for small providers
- Involving tutors and support staff in the adult and community learning quality agenda
- Learning in progress: recognising achievement in adult learning
- Listening to learners
- Making a difference: leading and managing for quality improvement in adult and community learning
- Managing staff development in adult and community learning: reflection to practice
- Mind the gap: making health and safety manageable in adult and community learning
- Need to know: making sense of information needs in adult and community learning
- Observation of teaching and learning in adult education: how to prepare for it, how to do it and how to manage it
- Self-assessment and development planning for adult and community learning providers
- Sink or swim? Guidance and support in adult and community learning
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dancing on a moving carpet

leading change for quality improvement in adult and community learning

Kate Watters, Anne Armstrong and Annie Merton
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Introduction

Awareness of change is part of what makes us human. Creating, responding to and living with change occupies much of our time and absorbs much of our energy, in all aspects of our lives.

For individuals, change often comes about as a result of increased self-awareness and a desire for growth. Organisations can also become more self-aware and self-critical – the self-assessment process is designed to bring this about. As with individuals, organisations can decide how they want to be different. The vision of how things can be different can be a strong motivator – or ‘pull factor’ – as people working in the organisation become frustrated by the gap between present reality and the future they desire and are working to achieve.

‘Push factors’ are also at work in adult and community learning (ACL). Against the backdrop of a political commitment to continuous improvement in the public sector, deciding to stick with ‘business as usual’ is not really an option. People and organisations in the public sector can expect that change will be required to be on a broad front and ongoing.

Change is paradoxical. For individuals and the organisations in which they work it can be exciting and enthralling – or it can be highly threatening. Page (1996, p148) describes it as ‘the source of all human progress and all human pain’.

This guide seeks to:

- consider how change for quality improvement in ACL can best be led and managed
- identify some of the drivers for change in the learning and skills sector
- explore a range of practical examples of organisational responses to the change imperative
- draw on relevant research and theoretical models
- identify factors that can help organisations and individuals respond positively to change and the need for continuous improvement
- consider organisational learning as a motivator for, and outcome of, change for quality improvement.

Through a series of case studies it looks at how leadership and management of change are developing and being enacted in the local authority ACL context. The guide also considers how an understanding of ideas, processes and techniques relevant to leading and managing change can help providers.
Adult and community learning and the wider public sector context

The government agenda for modernising public services requires a sea change in public sector leadership and management. The focus is on improving the delivery of services. Service standards must be developed and translated into reality for the citizen and consumer. This agenda applies to health, local government, education and training, and the police and criminal justice services. It embraces services that are directly delivered and those that are delivered through partnerships between the public, private and voluntary sectors.

Local authority ACL services have had to deal with considerable change over the last 5 years. Historical arrangements for adult learning provision may not make it easy to respond quickly. Much of this change has been in response to shifts in the national policy context for adult learning during this period. Shifts in government policy have impacted most on:

- service direction
- planning
- funding
- organisation
- quality assurance
- quality improvement.

In 1993 the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) was created. Funds spent on accredited adult learning were transferred out of local government budgets into the FEFC budget. Local education authorities (LEAs) responded in different ways.

About half of LEAs continued to run a directly managed adult or community education service, protecting the resource for non-accredited adult learning, which remained within local government budgets, and applying to the FEFC for the funds they needed to continue to run accredited learning. Most of these services benefited considerably from FEFC funding, learning over time to fulfil FEFC expectations around planning, monitoring, data collection and quality. They did not, however, have equal access with FE colleges to all FEFC support systems. Nor were they subject to FEFC inspection.
Other LEAs decided to focus only on non-accredited adult learning. Most of these decided to secure the provision of adult learning for their citizens by contracting with other organisations. In these LEAs the main resource for the provision was from the local government budget, supplemented in some instances, particularly in those LEAs serving areas of measurable social deprivation, with funding from other government funding streams, such as the Single Regeneration Budget or the European Social Fund. These sources were also accessed by some direct-delivery LEAs.

In the mid-1990s many of the contracting LEAs viewed their responsibility for contracting and monitoring provision as essentially administrative – more about accountability for the funding transferred than about seeking to exert a positive and strategic influence over the nature and quality of the provision purchased. Consequently, in these LEAs there was often insufficient investment in staff infrastructure for managing adult learning. Many LEAs employed only one officer or a very small team, with the postholders performing a wide range of key functions that often extended well beyond the management of adult learning.

During this period, Ofsted inspection reports had some influence on the quality of ACL provision secured by LEAs. As little staff resource was invested in the inspection of adult education and youth work, only a small annual inspection programme involving a few LEAs each year could be sustained. Most LEAs used Ofsted’s published inspection framework and FEFC’s inspection framework to inform the development of their own work in quality assurance and quality improvement. However, practice was patchy. Although the more forward-looking LEAs recognised the importance to their future development of their groundwork in creating quality standards and arrangements for assuring quality, others either did not give this work the same profile or did not have sufficient staff to attend to it.
Setting the stage for change

The Learning and Skills Act (2000) heralded the creation of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Two inspectorates would work with the sector: Ofsted and the new Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI). Inspecting ACL is the responsibility of the ALI.

All providers were to be subject to regular inspection. A Common Inspection Framework (CIF) was developed and published in 2001. The CIF provides a single set of standards for the new learning and skills sector. It places the emphasis of inspection on the experiences and expectations of individual learners. The key question at the heart of the CIF is: ‘How effective and efficient is the provision of education and training in meeting the needs of learners, and why?’

ALI/Ofsted 2001

This subtle shift of emphasis moved the inspection process from looking at what a provider does, to what difference those actions make to the experience and achievement of the learners. This has required providers to reconsider how they approach some key operational processes and to think carefully about how they provide evidence of the positive impact of their actions on learners.

The CIF also underpins the LSC’s process for reviewing the plans and performance of providers. The LSC developed a set of additional criteria to inform this process, as they needed to be sure that they addressed some of the key organisational processes crucial for quality improvement, such as strategic planning, financial probity, and health and safety arrangements.

Both inspection and LSC review process have raised the stakes considerably for local authority ACL services. The penalties of failing to make the grade are potentially far greater now, because this can lead to re-inspection and ultimately to withdrawal of funding if re-inspection reveals insufficient improvement.
Other factors affecting change in ACL

- The LSC guidance for adult learning plans (LSC 2003a, LSC 2003b) identified which parts of the curriculum the LSC considered to be priorities, including basic skills, family learning, ICT and neighbourhood renewal. As a result there has been an increased emphasis on these curriculum areas. As ALI inspection focuses closely on learners’ experience and achievement and their response to learning need, it has become increasingly necessary to demonstrate why a service has the curriculum it has and how it actively manages this.

- The government’s ‘Success For All’ strategy (DfES 2003) has introduced 3-year development planning, with targets for learner success rates and for the employment of qualified staff. Providers are expected to review their ‘mission’ and purposes and to contribute actively to strategic area review, which is intended to determine the range and nature of education and training provision needed in any given area.

- The government’s ‘Skills Strategy’ (DfES et al. 2003) describes the nature of provision that is required to meet both economic and social needs at the local level, and how the LSC will agree with each local LSC a minimum figure to spend on these different learning activities through local providers. Providers must therefore strike a balance between provision that builds towards a first full Level 2 qualification and those learning opportunities that contribute to community cohesion, citizenship and a learning culture. This inevitably means that judgements will have to be made to balance the requirements of central government with the priorities of the local authority.

- The requirement for regular self-assessment has highlighted the need for robust data to support evaluative judgements. This includes information gathered both from the direct observation of teaching and learning and from the collection and analysis of statistical data on recruitment, attendance and achievement. The quality improvement agenda has required investment in additional staff and management information systems (MIS), to ensure that the data is collected on time and checked for accuracy and reliability.
A challenging time

Becoming part of the learning and skills sector has meant that local authority ACL services have had to manage the change of moving from historical patterns of resourcing and coordination to new ones based on improved strategic planning in response to an ever-changing environment. The greatest challenge, however, has been to develop and introduce the kinds of quality systems now required without irrevocably distorting the nature of ACL provision offered.

It has been a challenging time. Rather then letting the rug be pulled from under them, local authority ACL services are learning to keep their feet on a moving carpet. Many are finding that they can even dance.
A positive approach

Responsiveness is at the heart of the modernisation agenda for public sector leadership and management. Probably the most important reason for change is the rising expectations of ‘customers’ or ‘service users’, who demand quality and expect ‘joined-up-ness’.

To deliver equality of access, agencies and providers are encouraged to make access to their services as straightforward as possible. All public sector providers are expected to be responsive to diverse needs. This involves a radical shift of emphasis from provider-led and professional-dominated services to services where development is led by the demands and the needs of users and potential users.

In ACL the impetus for greater responsiveness is linked to the LSC’s commitment to widening participation and achievement.

Investing in change

Recent research into public sector attitudes to change (CIPD April 2002, pp28–30) paints a mixed picture.

Positive features identified were:

- a strong work ethic, based on serving the community
- acknowledgement of high-quality personnel policies in the public sector
- recognition of the need for change.

However:

- the research raised questions as to whether public sector organisations are in practice always able to adhere to the personnel policies necessary to manage change well
- employees sometimes lack confidence in their managers’ ability to deliver change on the scale needed
- there is some evidence that public sector employees are particularly affected by the scale and scope of organisational change and are showing a degree of ‘initiative fatigue’.
The research suggests that for the necessary transformational change in the public services to happen, there must be investment in training and staff development programmes, to develop change leadership and project management skills and techniques. Leaders and managers of change need both ‘hard’ skills for performance measurement and ‘softer’ skills that win hearts and minds and are associated with cultural change.

A major challenge is to overcome cultural and operational differences between different public sector organisations providing services to individuals and communities, and their private or voluntary sector partners, so that the citizen (or customer) experiences a seamless service. Leaders operating in such a complex environment must be transformational, able to:

- identify clearly the links between policy and service delivery
- lead complex partnerships
- handle ambiguity in employee relationships
- manage stakeholder groups effectively.

This is particularly relevant in ACL, where there is much experience of strategic partnerships, and where collaborative working is critical to the achievement of the objectives of widening participation and addressing social exclusion.
Habits of successful change leaders

Susan Richards of the Birmingham University School of Public Management has identified the following key competencies associated with successful frontline change leadership.

Habits of successful change leaders in the modern public sector

Successful leaders...

1 Focus staff on strategic purpose – so people know why they are asked to work in new ways.

2 Listen carefully to staff, so that the real issues that are inhibiting change are addressed.

3 Listen to community stakeholders, and are able to work across organisational boundaries, engaging people in working together for change.

4 Give the highest priority to professional development – leadership in bringing about change in professional settings must have legitimacy within the professional culture if it is to be effective.

5 Work well with leaders of local services – forward-looking organisations are building partnerships with others to establish seamless services across their boundaries.

6 Give priority to achieving results – stick to their purpose, rather than capitalising on achievement to further their own careers.

7 Use the power of information to unblock the road to change – this links with an open culture, discussion of issues, willingness to confront.

8 Use project-based working to create a climate where individuals and teams can contribute to performance improvement.

9 Tell the story of change creatively and frequently, helping staff to make sense of the complex and multiple reality of what is happening.

CIPD April 2002, pp28–30
Understanding change

Organisational change could be described as a ‘dance’, in which there are many figures on the dance floor – soloists, pairs and sets of dancers – passing and interweaving, focusing on their moves yet aware of the movement of others. The forces driving change (necessity or motivation to improve) and the inevitable constraints (resistance or resource limitations) will affect the dancers’ momentum and direction.

Motivating forces

Figure 1  Motivating forces in the change process
Based on a series of models by Senge (1995)
Senge (1995) describes motivating forces and cyclical processes that interact during profound change. Briefly, these are:

- **‘because it matters’** – when the outcomes of participating in change, learning and development at an individual level result in enhanced personal results, such as improved performance and/or satisfaction, which in turn reinforce commitment to the change process.

- **‘because my colleagues take it seriously’** – when teams or networks of committed individuals actively engage in undertaking and evaluating change initiatives and are able to implement positive outcomes.

- **‘because it works’** – at an organisational level, the outcomes of change initiatives are seen, over time, to result in more effective processes, improved performance and tangible benefits. These include the achievement of targets, improved outcomes for learners, good inspection grades. The outcomes both vindicate the drive for change and reinforce commitment to change for continuous improvement.

These motivating forces and change cycles are interlinked and potentially mutually reinforcing. They may move at different and varying speeds, in response to internal factors (that slow or inhibit progress) or to external constraints.

### Constraints

Some common factors that Senge identifies as inhibiting changes at particular stages will be familiar.

At the initiation stage, inhibitors can be:

- **‘not enough time’** – those charged with undertaking pilot activity do not have sufficient flexibility over time and priorities (having to ‘keep the show on the road’ and initiate change).

- **‘not enough help’** – without the right backup, including information, coaching, guidance and support, people may flounder.

- **‘not relevant’** – the case for change is not sufficiently clear or compelling to ensure it gets priority in the context of competing demands on people’s time and energy.

- **dissonance** – between what is said and what is seen; those requiring and leading the change do not ‘walk the talk’ or they act in ways that belie the espoused values, undermining trust.
Once the change process is up and running, look out for:

- **fear and anxiety** – these can be engendered by uncertainty resulting from participating in change; seeing the world differently can be unsettling and learning is a risky business

- **perceptions about relative value** – for example, if qualitative ways of evaluating are more appropriate but quantitative information appears to carry more weight

- **polarisation between ‘true believers’ and ‘non-believers’** – where a pilot group or change team alienates those around them by ‘missionary zeal’, causing people to switch off or become defensive or cynical.

Senge suggests that when embedding and sustaining change it is necessary to:

- ‘change management processes and operational procedures’ – so that changes are mainstreamed and become part of ‘how we do things round here’

- ‘disseminate and diffuse’ – to ensure that the lessons learned and changes in working practices are adopted across the organisation

- ‘change the culture’ – embed into the organisational culture the habit of strategic review, and willingness to ask searching questions about organisational purpose and the best way to achieve this.

### How do we think about change?

Ways of thinking about change are influenced by how we view the nature of organisations. The metaphors and language we use can be revealing. They inform how we conceive of the change process and the kinds of change needed.

#### Mechanical or medical

When we talk about diagnosing causes for identified weaknesses, faults or problems, we are using a mechanical model or a medical model (where the body is seen as a machine, the heart as a pump and so on). When we talk about building new provision or restructuring, we imply that we see the organisation as a construction.

#### Biological or chemical

We speak of change as ‘growth’ or ‘evolution, adaptation and transformation’, of ‘catalysts for change’ or of ‘crystallising thoughts and perceptions’ – metaphors relating to biology or chemistry.
Psychological or spiritual
We also use psychological terms, such as ‘mental models or constructs’; or spiritual terms, referring to ‘values’, ‘creativity’ and ‘transformation’. When we refer to an organisation ‘learning’ (see ‘Learning through change’ on page 53), we imply that it can process information and reflect.

Social
If, however, we see organisations as social entities, we may speak of organisational ‘norms’ and ‘behaviours’ and the need to change these, and of organisational ‘culture’. Adopting the social construction perspective enables us to think about the ‘morale’ of the organisation or its ‘political climate’.

Ecological
Organisations can also be perceived as living systems operating within an ecology, struggling or thriving according to environmental forces such as the prevailing climate.

Complex adaptive systems
The metaphors above all refer to systems of varying degrees of complexity. Systems comprise interrelating parts. In simple systems it is easy to see cause and effect, where to intervene or exert leverage and what the likely impact will be. Organisations are more complex and less predictable, made up of individuals acting independently or networking with others, operating cooperatively in teams and working to implement systems within the larger system – for example, those concerned with quality assurance.

An important responsibility of leaders and managers is to scan the external ‘landscape’ in order to respond appropriately, adapting where necessary to accommodate, deal with or, in some cases, resist external forces for change. This can include taking action to influence or shape the external environment in which the organisation operates. Thus the complex adaptive system that is the organisation evolves to ensure that it is fit for new or changing purposes.

Seeing organisations as complex adaptive systems allows for the recognition of multiple perspectives and realities when considering organisational change. This helps us make sense of the dynamics of change and how different people react and respond.
Revealing metaphors

Organisations can be understood in any or all of the following ways:

- as organisms – which have the capacity to grow and develop spontaneously through interactions between individuals, for example tutors sharing ideas and adopting practices which they can see work effectively in a particular situation

- as workplaces and arenas – where individuals’ working lives are enacted and career paths developed. This has an important bearing on how people can best be motivated to change, and suggests that those leading change must recognise that not everyone will respond enthusiastically

- as political systems – just think how rumour and disinformation can spread, often more quickly than ‘official’ communications

- as cultures – with widely understood ways of operating, explicit or implicit values of which people are aware, and day-to-day established practices (‘how we do things round here’). An organisation may include distinct subcultures, perhaps relating to particular locations (‘our learning centre is really friendly and welcoming’) or areas of learning (‘I couldn’t get my tutors to go along with that, it’s not how they work’). Organisational cultures can be inclusive, or exclusive and intolerant. Cultures that value diversity and see it as an asset are more likely to cope well with change. Responding positively to diversity sets them on the path of organisational learning.
A major stimulus for change to bring about quality improvement has been self-assessment and critical self-review, informed by an understanding of the implications of messages in inspection reports. A second main thrust has been to anticipate changing expectations arising from government policy priorities.

The 14 case studies below, based on interviews with practitioners, illustrate a range of ways in which provider organisations have sought to use change for quality improvement. Their strategies are informed by:

- an understanding of the rationale for the change
- perceptions about the nature of organisations and change processes.

The ‘habits of successful change leaders in the modern public sector’ identified by Richards (see page 9) are reflected in the case studies. The strategies described in the case studies illustrate key themes linking with Richards’s analysis of leadership behaviours:

- articulating and focusing on strategic purpose
- recognising that the knowledge, skills, actions and attitudes of staff are critical
- working collaboratively for change, both internally and externally
- giving priority to realising the vision through improved performance
- using data and information effectively.

Two further themes emerge from the case studies, however:

- ensuring that structures and ways of working are designed to achieve results
- using technology to support the change process.
Case study 1 Structural changes

For Dorset Adult Education Service, structural changes preceded other changes.

Since the service participated in the ALI pilot inspections of ACL, the structure of the senior management team has been changed, with the addition of a post to lead on quality assurance and equality and diversity. Changes have also been made in the overall organisational structure, adding cross-service curriculum leadership for the main areas of learning, creating a matrix. It was important to develop a practicable structure that suited the geography of the service and that could be resourced.

Another critical feature has been to encourage effective joint working between administrative staff and managers.

A strong future focus and a more planned and strategic approach to the development of the service have been adopted.

A growing number of whole-service, interlinked strategic development plans are now in place. Operational area managers’ development plans have been agreed and support the achievement of these whole-service plans. Increasingly, the timeframe for service strategies is 3 years, with annual operational plans and targets.
The challenges have been:

- altering the self-perceptions of some staff, who had not previously seen themselves as managers

- encouraging staff to move beyond their ‘comfort zones’ and take advantage of the new arrangements to adopt a more strategic role

- managing workloads that can increase when change is taking place, particularly when people take on new responsibilities while being reluctant to relinquish old ones.

Benefits of the change strategy have been that:

- staff can see that the matrix approach brings effective local operational management of provision within a coherent and consistently high-quality county-wide curriculum offer and service for learners, across a largely rural county

- both middle and senior managers are much more aware of the need for – and their responsibilities for – quality assurance processes

- staff have had scope to act as ‘change agents’, sharing their commitment and enthusiasm with others

- approximately 40% of adult education managers are now enrolled on a management development programme, offered by Dorset County Council. This has the added benefit of encouraging teamwork, as managers from different parts of the service participate together.

‘Initiating change won’t make you popular! It is worth remembering Machiavelli’s words: “There is nothing more difficult to plan, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage than the creation of a new system. For the initiator has the enmity of all who would profit by the preservation of the old institutions, and merely lukewarm defenders in those who would gain by the new ones.”'
Case study 2 Improving curriculum leadership

**Stockton-on-Tees Adult Education Service** has also changed its structures to improve curriculum leadership.

Two principles informed the changes:

- to develop and work with the service’s existing staff to identify the changes needed and the best ways to address these
- to be realistic about timescales.

Adopting these principles had the effect of reassuring staff that the service had confidence in their ability to adapt, and that the time necessary to ‘put the M into MIS’, for example, was recognised.

One example of how change has occurred is in relation to administrative support. The need arose for specialisation in improving management information, to meet external and internal requirements. The existing emphasis on multitasking, and a ‘flat’ structure, did not readily support such a change. Administrative staff were consulted and their suggestions for differentiated posts and pay grades were adopted. All positions were open to all staff and everyone has now been accommodated within the new structure, resulting in greater administrative capacity as well as clearer roles and responsibilities.
Other changes include:

- strategic thinking about the curriculum offer
- identifying curriculum managers as ‘champions for change’, encouraged by peer pressure and by managers to innovate
- progressive delegation of responsibility for decision-making and resources, providing opportunity for greater flexibility and responsiveness to local need
- collective agreement on a range of criteria and indicators to inform management decisions and provide performance indicators in the context of quality assurance
- introducing a system of performance management.

The system is driven by careful monitoring of action plans and of progress towards targets, where appropriate. The head of service meets monthly with senior managers and termly with senior managers and curriculum managers together. The approach enables managers to show pride in the work of the tutors and combines accountability with support, enabling support to be offered where necessary to ensure that service priorities are achieved.
Case study 3  Organisational restructuring

Another service that has chosen to focus on the quality of teaching and learning, and on support for tutors, particularly those working in community locations, is Westminster Adult Education Service. Here, however, the strategy has involved changes in organisational structure.

The service has focused increasingly on building capacity in the community. However, it recognised that the quality of the provision, delivered in over 50 community venues by part-time tutors, was inadequate. Embedding quality initiatives was difficult. Tutors, mostly part-time, often felt isolated, yet were reluctant to commit to training; those who did acquire new skills often left for permanent jobs elsewhere. The few salaried staff, overburdened with administration, struggled to engender team spirit.

External consultants confirmed that over-dependence on part-time staff was inhibiting quality improvement. The decision was taken to restructure, increasing both the number of salaried staff and their teaching commitments, so that managers could keep in touch with the quality of curriculum delivery.

- There are now three levels of management responsibility, with clearly defined responsibilities for:
  - quality assurance
  - budgets
  - programme development.
Course team leaders, who are responsible for quality assurance and the provision of advice, guidance and support for learners, now manage part-time tutors in small teams.

All academic post-holders now teach at least one-third of their hours in community venues.

A new team of academic administrators handles essential administrative and routine monitoring duties.

Ensuring that greater responsibility is taken at every level within the new structure, and that both teaching and management responsibilities are managed effectively, has been challenging. The change in structure took time; this sometimes made it difficult to maintain motivation, creativity and momentum. During the change process dialogue was maintained with trades unions, human resource issues were sensitively handled and staff were kept informed at all stages. A management training programme provides support for those taking up new posts.

Benefits of the new structure include:

- better understanding of learner and community needs
- greater awareness of quality assurance processes and how these can improve the quality of learners’ experience
- part-time tutors who feel better supported, whose training needs are better identified and who have increased commitment and job satisfaction
- the quality of teaching and learning has improved as a result of accessible management support, a rigorous process of lesson observation and targeted training and staff development.
Case study 4 Focus on teaching and learning

Coventry Adult Education Service has also focused attention on knowing about – and improving the quality of – teaching and learning, encouraged by its experience of participating in the ALI pilot inspections of ACL.

This experience, and the work done to develop effective self-assessment processes, both confirmed the importance of needing to know what was going on in the learning situation – what was being done well, and what needed to be improved. The system of observing teaching and learning has evolved over time, with the active engagement of staff. It has a central role in providing valid and reliable evidence for managers for self-assessment and decision-making purposes. Whereas the previous system was essentially staff development oriented, the current process has a dual function: it retains the emphasis on supporting and developing staff, and it addresses the need for accountability through monitoring arrangements linked to the quality assurance system.

Initially, three broad descriptors were used, rather than formal grading. This changed when the evaluation of the pilot phase found that tutors who had been observed wanted ‘more rigour’ and more detail about how their performance was rated. As a result, the seven-point grading system used by inspectors has been adopted. Tutors also liked the fact that feedback is sought from learners, and the emphasis on ‘judgement-rich reporting’ in the guidance given to trained observers. This enables tutors to receive specific messages and formal written feedback about what they do well and how they could further improve the quality of learners’ experience and outcomes.

Aggregated and anonymised summary data informs self-assessment judgements about tutor effectiveness – the service aims for 100% of tutors to be observed every year, with new tutors being observed in their first term. The underpinning philosophy is one of working at continuous improvement – together.

‘If people see themselves as the victims of change, they hate it. If they see themselves as change agents, they love it.’

Dancing on a moving carpet
Case study 5  Improving data collection

A number of providers have placed a strong emphasis on improving the collection, analysis and use of data. At Leicester Adult Education College, improved management information has enabled staff to see more clearly the profile of learners currently engaged. They recognise its potential as a tool to help track changes that are taking place.

The aim is to achieve a ‘virtuous circle’, where staff are keen to ensure that data is accurate and see the need to address any gaps in the data. For example, information is now being sought from adults who leave courses early, to identify any barriers to continuation that need to be addressed.
Case study 6  A listening process

Listening to staff and using feedback gathered from a range of sources was a main starting point for a programme of change for quality improvement within Manchester City Council’s Adult Education Service.

During an agreed period of consultation prior to any major changes in structure, the newly appointed head of lifelong learning, who was responsible for the strategic management of change, set about gathering views from those delivering the service. A series of ‘surgeries’ took place, during which staff were asked what was helping and hindering them and what needed to change. The underlying assumption was that staff knew what worked well, and what didn’t, and wanted to do a good job for learners. A framework of questions was available to start off the dialogue and staff were free to raise issues and concerns. The meetings were recorded by a scribe, enabling the head of lifelong learning to listen with full attention.

A number of clear messages and patterns of concern emerged. This feedback was set alongside a number of other sources of information, for example:

- the outcomes of staff satisfaction surveys
- curriculum surveys
- a review of budget planning
- the available management information
- feedback from learners about what was encouraging or discouraging their participation.
The listening process:

- generated information that enabled some practical matters to be resolved – achieving some ‘quick wins’
- identified some priorities, for example the need to maximise learning and achievement and develop progression routes for learners
- built up a picture of the service.

This information was shared with staff. It also informed a management ‘away day’ to consider national and local agendas, the current position, where the service wanted and needed to be – and how to get there. A clear vision emerged: recognition of the need for a phased change in structure; and an ongoing dialogue within the service about how best to bring about the changes needed.

The powerful question to be answered whenever alternative solutions are being proposed is: ‘How would this benefit learners?’ This reflects the service’s commitment to improving the lives of local people, and to making the changes necessary to achieve this.
Case study 7 Developing robust MIS

Harrow LEA was the first LEA ACL provider to be awarded a Grade 2 for leadership and management by the ALI. Strengths identified included:

- having a clear strategic direction for the development of provision
- effective partnerships leading to innovative learning programmes
- good use of data to contribute to planning.

These three strengths are linked. The feasibility of a development strategy was in part dependent on effective use of data, which in turn supported productive relationships with ‘partners’ – the service’s preferred term for subcontractors.

The rationale for developing robust MIS arose from three aims:

- to change the nature of relationships, moving from a ‘contract management’ approach to enabling and facilitating partnership working between the LEA and providers. This would support a move from a demand-led, market-based model to a wider, needs-based range of provision, reflecting the role of ACL within the authority’s wider development strategies in relation to the arts, health, housing and community development

- to improve the quality and robustness of data so that it informed planning rather than merely being used for monitoring purposes. This was essential in moving towards formula funding and proactivity in widening participation
to maximise the advantages of a small, flexible central infrastructure. The system gives the LEA comprehensive data in a common format. All partners – from large FE colleges to small voluntary organisations – comply with clear specifications. Guidance for data entry is appended to service-level agreements. All providers have equal status and access to the data. Technical requirements are minimal and no additional software is needed – the system is web-based. Through a common online portal providers can access and interrogate their own data – useful for voluntary organisations when preparing funding bids, for example. A direct online enrolment module is available and used by small community and voluntary organisations. When planning, the LEA can make ‘real-time’ enquiries, rather than asking providers for specific reports.

Benefits include:

- acceptance on the part of all providers that the data is both necessary and accurate
- less duplication of effort in providing data and reports
- the LEA being better able to respond to external requirements from the ALI and LSC
- the service being able to contribute to wider developments in this field
- when planning, the service being able to target by postcode and ward in a more sophisticated way.

It has been challenging to develop this robust and useful system with limited additional funding and in the face of resistance from some partners used to their own systems. Keeping abreast of changing external requirements is demanding, with minimal staffing at the centre. The big change has been that reliable data now serves the LEA’s change strategy and the needs of future learners.

‘You have to be very clear about what you want from providers to whom you subcontract, and why – and provide the necessary infrastructure, guidance and support to enable them to deliver, whatever their starting points or levels or resource and expertise … You can only work with what you have got, so turn around what could be seen as a disadvantage and play to the strengths of the way the service is set up.’
Case study 8 Using performance indicators

The driving force behind changes introduced by Somerset County Council Adult Learning and Leisure Service was clarity about the need for change in order to equip the service to address the new quality agenda. Changes here focused on ways of working and organisational culture, rather than on changes to structures.

The approach adopted was to use suitably adapted business practices. Priority was given to effective management of service performance, as a shift was made from a centre-based, demand-led service to one that delivers an increasing proportion of learning opportunities aimed at widening participation, in partnership with a range of partners including voluntary organisations.

Extensive consultation took place within the service. This confirmed that many staff were willing to challenge their previous assumptions and practices in the interests of developing the service for learners, even where the changes being introduced could be seen as limiting a previously very high degree of autonomy at a local level.

A system of performance management is now in place, using an agreed set of service performance indicators against which progress towards targets (linked to objectives reflecting service priorities) is measured and reported. The performance indicators include data on retention rates and course cancellation rates – the latter are down dramatically since regular reporting began. The MIS provides the data for reports, using information supplied by all centres and partner organisations.
Using a simple form, all staff with management responsibilities, including project managers, report to their line managers monthly on:

- progress against key improvement objectives
- plans for the next reporting period
- any associated issues or risks of which line managers should be aware
- action planned to address these, with a named person and target date for completion.

The benefits of these organisational changes are:

- staff are clear about their responsibilities and where their effort needs to be focused
- criteria for measuring performance are clear
- detailed guidance, support and encouragement, the sharing of good practice and coaching have all contributed to the changes in service orientation and organisational culture that are taking place.

‘People will give things up if they can see it is for the good of the service and right for learners. It is surprising and heart-warming to see that people will work together, rather than compete, to do what’s best.’
Case study 9  A two-stage process

The quality improvement strategy adopted to bring about change in Hounslow LEA combined, in two stages, a whole-organisation approach led proactively ‘from the top’, followed by an incremental change process which focused on the practices of those closest to learners – the tutors.

The first stage, prompted by a growing understanding of inspection requirements, involved the development of a comprehensive quality framework. This framework built on existing quality procedures, which had served the organisation well during a Best Value review, and is helping the service prepare for inspection. An important aim was to instil a sense of collective responsibility for delivering the service to quality standards, monitoring and improvement. Involving people helped to develop ownership of the quality framework. It was also critical that the systems were being properly implemented by all staff and that the outcomes of review procedures were analysed and this valuable information fed back into the system.

The second stage of the strategy, taken forward during and after a change of leadership, was to focus on classroom practice. Steps were taken to:

- support improvements in teaching and learning, with staff training and development addressing concerns or support needs identified through lesson observation
- improve record-keeping and evidence-gathering by tutors and curriculum managers
- embed a data-friendly culture.
External consultants helped with specific developments. Opportunities were also taken to learn from neighbours, for example setting up ‘like-meet-like’ meetings between senior managers and curriculum staff from the service and colleagues from neighbouring services who had recently been inspected.

So what has changed?

- Self-assessment reports now include statistical data to support claims about strengths and to explain decisions about weaknesses.

- Coincidental with the integration into day-to-day practice of the quality framework, retention and achievement rates have improved.

- A quality board and a number of advisory groups have evolved. These now involve curriculum, support and administration managers, with feedback informing management decisions.

- A recent discovery by the head of service that a group of administrative staff had decided autonomously to come in on a Saturday to improve the filing system suggests there is a very good measure of joint responsibility for quality.
Case study 10  Building relationships with partners

The approach to change by Gloucestershire LEA’s adult education service has been pragmatic. As a contracted-out service, it has been essential to build effective and productive relationships with partners. Two sets of relationships were considered critical, for different reasons:

- the essentially ‘business’ relationship with the local LSC office
- relationships with a number of subcontractors at various stages of development.

The service was proactive in taking early opportunities to share quality improvement development work, such as a quality assurance ‘toolkit’ to support continuous improvement.

When working with partners, the LEA has modelled the use of external quality indicators such as the CIF and the LSC’s performance review requirements to inform its own quality assurance and improvement arrangements and expectations, thus familiarising other organisations with these.

Recognising the need for consistency and coherence has been another driver for change for quality improvement in many services, whether directly delivered or secured partly or wholly through subcontracting arrangements. Successful partnership working, whether with internal or external partners, is a prerequisite for achieving this objective.

‘It is important to understand where people are coming from, their agendas and needs. Also to recognise that in each relationship a different mix of support and challenge is required – to respond to a particular culture … The rate of progress towards quality improvement is not directly related to the length of time that an organisation has had quality systems in place!’
Case study 11  Working with the community

One organisation that has given priority to working for quality improvement within the existing stated values and organisational culture is Gateshead Council Adult Learning Service. The service’s aim is to develop people through supportive communities.

When developing a change strategy to address current quality assurance requirements, two starting points were identified:

- to harness the energy in the local communities whose needs the service sought to address
- to build on positive features of the service, specifically a profound and ‘lived’ commitment on the part of many staff to equality of opportunity and valuing diversity.

The major challenge was to retain what was most valued by members of local communities, for example responsiveness to community needs and agendas, while introducing necessary accountability measures. Volunteer potential change agents were identified and given support, access to accredited training and a real route through to accreditation and employment.

The service also maintains a tradition of working through projects developed in consultation with local people, with associated, mainly oral, evaluation and reporting procedures. These have been successfully adapted to provide documentary evidence, capturing the achievements of participating learners without distorting the nature of the activity.

Witness statements from learners about what they had gained from participation in community-generated learning activities provided an essential source of evidence during inspection. Empowered by their experiences as learners, people from the communities were confident when talking about their learning with inspectors they did not know, thus demonstrating the ‘proof of the pudding’ in relation to the service’s mission and purpose. The service is now developing ways of drawing on the strong oral traditions within local cultures to involve people in evaluation and self-assessment processes for quality improvement.

‘In seeking to remain true to your principles, when you are a community-focused service, you risk not complying with external expectations, for example around funding... we are always on the edge!’
Case study 12  A consistent and systematic approach

Helping people across a large service to see why consistency matters, in the context of self-assessment and preparing for inspection, was the driver for Essex County Council to ‘mainstream’ initiatives, share new practices and develop a coherent county-wide approach. This service sought to persuade people to give up what was perceived as a degree of autonomy ‘for the greater good’ – so that whole-organisational needs arising from external requirements could be addressed.

Essex County Council officers knew that when inspected by the ALI, the LEA adult education service would be the ‘unit of inspection’. As such, the LEA is responsible for leadership and management, including equality of opportunity and quality assurance, across the whole county, even though the delivery is secured through delegation to semi-autonomous adult colleges. A number of development projects had enabled central staff and colleagues from the adult colleges to be change agents in bringing about increased willingness to share practices and work for greater consistency of approach, for example in quality assurance arrangements. However, there remained a perception that giving up ‘doing your own thing’ could result in loss of local identity.

What moved the need for consistency to centre stage was the collective recognition that the production of a high-quality, service-wide self-assessment report in the required format, using areas of learning, was just not possible without a common approach. For the service to be able to present itself to best advantage, data collection and presentation and self-assessment judgements at a local level needed to be capable of aggregation at a county level.
A second catalyst for change in the balance between a high level of autonomy and agreement to operate common procedures and to agreed standards has been the use of external consultancy through the Adult and Community Learning Quality Support Programme (ACLQSP). The involvement of critical friends, who provided an external ‘warts and all’ view, has added momentum. They were perceived as ‘honest brokers’. Their analysis has encouraged the formation of county-wide curriculum groups with a strategic role in developing the range of provision and progression routes for learners, sharing and fostering good practice and identifying and addressing staff training needs.

The big difference is that a consistent and systematic approach to quality improvement is now seen as mainstream leadership and management activity. By building on previous initiatives, working with the current organisational model for delivery and involving personnel from the adult education colleges in service-wide development, all parties have been brought on board successfully. The Quality Assurance Project Team has now become the county Quality Assurance Group, with high-level commitment from all partners, underpinned by reaffirmed shared values. A similar change has taken place in relation to other project teams. The colleges are discovering that they have:

- a common cause – in striving to improve the quality of learner experience
- more similarities than they had previously thought
- much to gain from sharing.

‘Build on what is already in place – reflect the realities of trying to achieve a whole-service picture back to the constituent parts – so they can see what’s making it difficult to respond to external requirements and how their actions or changes of approach could improve matters … Make quality development part of people’s roles and responsibilities, not tacked on or squeezed in.’
Lancashire County Council’s Adult and Continuing Education Service has also sought to create coherence and consistency, this time across a ‘mixed economy’ service of adult education colleges, further education partners and community and voluntary organisations. The approach adopted has been to identify change agendas on which all parts of the service could engage in collaborative development work.

The first ‘shared agenda’ was to develop a service-wide quality assurance framework. This led to the recognition that there could be ‘no quality without equality’ – of access, opportunity and outcome. An equality audit, triggered by an ACLQSP publication (Reisenberger and Dadzie 2002) led to the realisation that a strategic commitment to equality of opportunity (EO) was not enough.

A first step was to have EO matters as a standard agenda item at all meetings. This raised awareness of the issues and size of the change needed. When trying to identify appropriate equality and diversity targets it rapidly became apparent that all parts of the service, and all policies and procedures, must be considered again in the context of actively promoting EO.

A senior position of equal opportunities and race equality manager was created, with the development work being overseen by a management group chaired by a member of the county strategic management team.
An equality and diversity manual has been created, which includes:

- updated policies and related procedures
- the service’s equality and diversity action plan and targets
- arrangements for monitoring
- guidance for staff (e.g., on using data to inform self-assessment judgements)
- forms of evidence
- information on how to access support.

Benefits of this approach are that:

- the service now sees itself as a whole service, working to a shared agenda without loss of autonomy
- the essential integration of equality and quality is widely understood
- accurate data is perceived to be helpful in seeing what needs attention and what is being achieved.

‘Don’t panic when you see the enormity of the change that’s needed – ‘slow but sure’ is the way. As you work your way forward, you begin to see the benefits in terms of really addressing the issues at the level of the learner.’
Case study 14 Making life easier

All the themes identified as underpinning the change for quality improvement strategies are evident in the case study from Buckinghamshire Adult Learning.

Its approach has been to bring about a fundamental shift of focus on the part of managers and staff. This is exemplified by the use of the term ‘adult learning’ in place of ‘adult education’ or ‘adult and community learning’. The clear message is that the service sees the learning needs of adults in a wide range of contexts, including the workplace, as its domain. The service’s mission is now defined as ‘Delivering adult learning fit for the 21st century’ and the focus is firmly on the future.

A major debate on the changes necessary to achieve the mission took place within the organisation. The debate was externally facilitated. Changes agreed included moving from a disparate service managed in geographical areas, to one that would operate holistically and ensure that development was curriculum-driven in the interests of a wider range of adults. The quality of teaching and learning were to be the key drivers for the service.

Once the direction had been determined a new structure was designed, with roles and responsibilities clearly related to academic and operational requirements. Two hundred and fifty people applied for the new posts.

ICT was harnessed to:

- support change through the introduction of a managed learning environment to replace the previous MIS
- serve management and learning needs more effectively
- ‘make life easier’ for staff.
‘Making life easier’ is the name of the service’s change management programme. This has an integrated communication strategy, ensuring that staff and students are kept informed about developments. Information and learning technology has enabled connection to SuperJanet, and Buckinghamshire Adult Learning aims to offer all students active e-mail accounts, managed through the UK Education and Research Networking Association (UKERNA). This will enable interaction between students, tutors and service managers. Registers can already be marked online – and tutors are not paid until that is done!

Becoming a whole service – where staff see the ‘big picture’ and understand their contribution to achieving the vision – has had great benefits, not least an ongoing dialogue about continuous improvement and a more proactive approach to leadership and management. However, the road has not been easy. Empowerment brings responsibility and the deployment of a comprehensive performance management framework ensuring that all staff have targets and goals that can be seen to contribute to the effectiveness of the provision. Buy-in has been gained, but the management team has had to be prepared to keep up the momentum of change and weather a degree of discomfort as the desired transformation takes place.

‘Empower people to do the job … and when making new friends and partners, don’t forget the tried and trusted ones.’
Change strategies fit for purpose and context

While each organisation in the suite of case studies has developed its own strategy for change, the common themes identified earlier are also illustrated.

Frequent references are made in the case studies to **performance management**, an important tool when seeking to align individual and team efforts towards the achievement of strategic objectives. Several services also refer to **staff development** programmes to support employees in responding to change. In the past, many changes were introduced only through staff development. The combination of planned training and development with systematic performance management can really make a difference. Everyday practices change as new ways of working are reinforced and become internalised.

**Structural changes** are described as a means of achieving quality improvements in a number of cases.

Overt references to **changing the culture**, whether as a strategic objective or as a by-product of changing structures or systems, are less frequent.

**There is no ‘right answer’**

These case studies illustrate how leaders, managers and staff are working together to improve the quality of experience and achievement for learners. Their approaches are appropriate to their organisational culture and operating context. Taken together, they reinforce that there is no ‘right answer’ – the strategy has to flow from analysis of the current position, set alongside a vision of where you want to be, and the development of a suitable strategy to get there.

**Figure 2  Developing your change strategy**
Dealing with feelings about change

For individuals and organisations alike, change is a process that engages the emotions. Organisms – people or organisations – exhibit dual tendencies: to protect themselves from harm or discomfort; and to take action to exert some control over their destinies. A key determinant of the ability to survive in a changing environment is responsiveness, the ability to adapt. How people (and organisations) respond emotionally to change depends on many factors, including the extent to which the change has been anticipated and whether it is imposed or negotiated.

Figure 3 illustrates people’s feelings during the four-stage cycle of the change process. The incentive or stimulus to move from stage to stage may be internal or external. Individuals, however, move at their own pace.

**Figure 3 Experiencing the change process**
Adapted from Janssen (Weisbord 1987)

- **Contentment**
  - This represents the status quo, comfort zone or even a fur-lined rut.
  - There is little motivation to change

- **Denial**
  - Often the first reaction to a change stimulus is denial, resistance or defensiveness, rather than acceptance (‘Surely we aren’t really expected to...’)
  - Change disturbs the equilibrium

- **Renewal**
  - Energy is harnessed to bring about change, which is then accommodated and internalised

- **Confusion**
  - In order to change, and to offset anxiety, there is a need to understand just what is involved, what the implications are, before taking the necessary action
Moving through this cycle can be uncomfortable, even stressful. However, anxiety brings energy. When you are anxious, your mind may be racing and you may struggle to turn that mental activity to good account. Entering the ‘confusion’ stage signifies readiness to learn. The role of leaders of change is to recognise potential growth points and help the organisation to harness anxiety and move through ‘confusion’ into ‘renewal’. A new state of ‘contentment’ is reached, if only temporarily, as changes become norms.

Leaders need skill and sensitivity. If individuals are subjected to too much anxiety during the process of change, they are less likely to learn. If, during the ‘confusion’ stage, they can be well supported so that they can contain their anxiety, and resist responding with ‘fight’ (resistance) or ‘flight’ (back into denial or defensiveness), then their energy can be captured and directed to bring about the necessary transformation.

**Reasons for resisting change**

It is important to understand why some individuals resist change.

A major cause of resistance derives from people’s personal feelings and emotions. Everyone affected by change, whatever their position in an organisation, will experience emotional responses. Individuals and groups may react in a variety of ways, ranging from apathy to enthusiasm, passive resistance to deliberate attempts at subversion. Leaders and managers should consider potential sources and causes of resistance in order to develop strategies for overcoming difficulties and supporting people through the change process.

Kanter (1984) suggests 10 causes of resistance to change and strategies to deal with these. These may be summarised as follows:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for resistance</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Feeling a loss of control – feeling ‘done to’ rather than actively engaged</td>
<td>Involve people in decision-making and finding creative solutions while being honest about non-negotiables or constraints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 High levels of personal anxiety arising from uncertainty about the impact of change on themselves, or how long the change process will last</td>
<td>Explain what is happening, and why; outline the phasing and timetable for change; work with people to explore the implications for themselves and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Being surprised – not being informed or not having enough time to absorb information about forthcoming changes before implementation</td>
<td>Develop a communication strategy which ensures that people have the information they need in a timely manner and can think through the implications before the process starts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Fear of loss of status or face – if the way they work is seen as irrelevant or inadequate in the new situation</td>
<td>Acknowledge people’s competence and value to the organisation; involve them; encourage confidence in the ability to rise to the challenge (‘You can do it!’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Concerns about competence – will they measure up, can they change as required?</td>
<td>Make it clear that training will be provided; set up supportive structures and arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Fear of increased workload arising from the change process and the new circumstances that will result</td>
<td>Acknowledge that change will mean extra work, at least in the short term; emphasise the need to work ‘smarter’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Loss of identification with the organisation – if everything changes and nothing is familiar</td>
<td>Only change what needs to be changed, not change for the sake of it; honour the past and the present</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Unexpected and unplanned outcomes of the change process, perhaps in another part of the organisation</td>
<td>Think through the overall change process; anticipate the possible range of impact; risk assess and have contingency plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 ‘The history’ – old resentments may surface if the initiators of change are not respected or trusted as a result of past change efforts</td>
<td>Pay attention to what is going on and being said, and bring to the surface any such concerns; do not put people in a position which you are not confident they can handle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Genuine possible threats to individuals – for example where a change of structure may result in redundancies</td>
<td>Be honest about any such possibilities; acknowledge anxieties; follow good personnel practices; seek to find different ways to use skills and experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
You may find it helpful to reflect on this analysis, and how it relates to your own experience.

- Consider which of these reasons for resistance to change are prevalent in your service, and why.
- Identify the practical steps you could take to implement the strategies in your organisation.

**Resistance can be protective**

Apart from helping leaders and managers to gauge the effectiveness of the communication strategy or training and support arrangements, resistance may provide valuable information.

Responses or actions that could be seen as self-protective – and that could be described as ‘dinosaur’, ‘ostrich’ or ‘blocking’ behaviour – may actually signal recognition of a genuine threat to the ‘organism’. For example, an individual whose present position is threatened by planned changes, which include the possibility of redundancy, has reason to be anxious.

Leaders and managers should pay attention to similar expressions of resistance from particular areas or from across the organisation. These may arise from fears that the outcomes of proposed actions, or the way they are being carried out, may:

- damage the identity and unique selling point of the organisation
- undermine the stated strategic objectives
- be at odds with the espoused values of the organisation.
How to overcome resistance

- Make the case for change effectively. Involve people in clarifying the reasons for change and the nature of the change required – and why it matters (including the consequences of not changing).

- Provide a clear vision of what the change will mean. Set out the benefits for the organisation’s mission and values and for the main stakeholders.

- Build confidence. Draw on earlier organisational, team and individual success in adapting to changed circumstances – remind people of past developments that are now accepted practice.

- Listen and pay attention to expressions of resistance to change. Do not automatically dismiss these as emotional reactions on the part of individuals – they may be a valuable source of feedback and may alert you to a need for closer monitoring or rethinking aspects of the change implementation programme.

- Once the practical implications of changes in policy or strategy have been identified and communicated, act quickly to implement these. Uncertainty is demoralising.
Ready to dance?

A change process may be reactive, initiated by a perceived need to act swiftly – for example, when a crisis arises from a failure to recognise the need to respond to changes in the external operating environment or from inability to implement planned change effectively. More positively, it may be prompted by the realisation that a proactive approach is needed to make the most of opportunities or to avoid problems in the future.

Different types of change require different approaches and skills on the part of leaders and managers. The mix will be contingent on the kind of change needed. Other factors, such as the scale of change and the timescale within which it must be accomplished, will also determine the leadership approach and skills needed.

A checklist for change

Successful change depends on the abilities of leaders and managers at all levels in the organisation. The following competencies – or lack of them – can make the difference between frustration and failure or success. This applies whether the change is taking place through projects or pilot schemes, or across a whole organisation.

On your own, or with colleagues, use the checklist below to establish your starting point in relation to these critical leadership and management competencies.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competence</th>
<th>Confident</th>
<th>Need to work on this</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Imagining and envisaging what can be</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seeing the wood for the trees – identifying those critical factors which need to change</td>
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<td>Understanding the practical and political consequences of proposed change strategies</td>
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<td>Communicating the vision, the strategy and confidence that the change can be achieved</td>
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<td>Planning, including action planning, pacing the change process, identifying resources and support mechanisms</td>
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<td>Empathising with others’ positions and concerns</td>
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<tr>
<td>Listening and observing what is going on – on the surface and underneath</td>
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<td>Building alliances and coalitions; bringing people together to work on a common agenda; building and supporting teams</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dealing effectively with conflict and opposition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motivating people to generate and try out new ideas and ways of working</td>
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<td>Building confidence and self-esteem so that people are willing to take risks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trusting people to find creative ways to solve problems and organise themselves</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gathering, analysing and using feedback; providing feedback to others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Showing humility – recognising when neither you nor anyone else in the organisation can help, willingness to call on expertise or use ‘critical friends’</td>
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<td>Being flexible – change rarely goes smoothly</td>
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<td>Energising and enthusing others, particularly when things are not going according to plan</td>
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Making change happen – with a focus on quality

All the principles, challenges and pitfalls generally associated with leading organisational change apply to leading change for quality improvement in ACL.

Leaders in quality need to make sure that everyone is committed to quality improvement and to completing the quality cycle. To bring a whole service to this point may be an uphill struggle, although awareness of the threat or gift of inspection or LSC review process may focus minds even where there is no heartfelt commitment to quality improvement for its own sake.

The leader seeking to create a service culture of quality improvement needs:

- to be passionate about quality and to have the skills to transmit their passion to others
- the skills to develop the policy and clarity about who is to lead in this area
- an understanding of quality systems
- an understanding of how the service will be externally judged
- an understanding of the culture of their organisation and of how to change it
- a set of strategies and an action plan to make change happen.

Passion

Being passionate about quality improvement is essential for any leader who is trying to instil a quality culture. However, while all educational leaders may declare their aspirations for a quality agenda publicly, some may either lack the passion or feel that they have other priorities – for example the budget, strategic planning or even fire-fighting. A leader who is less than passionate about the implementation of the quality cycle needs to delegate leadership to a ‘quality champion’ who has the passion and can transmit it.
Setting the policy and choosing the quality leader

The quality policy, whether explicit or implicit, must determine that everybody has a responsibility for delivering, reviewing, reporting and improving. However, specific responsibilities for making this happen must be allocated to named individuals. This will set the scene for the cultural change and the aims and the objectives of the strategy to bring about success.

Should the principal or head of service lead this process? Or should it be an individual or a small group of people at lower levels? Both choices present challenges.

Managing from the top is clearly the most powerful position to be in, but it is not always easy for the leader to be in touch with the whole organisation and they will inevitably have many other areas of focus. So the principal or head of service should ask themselves whether they are the right person to take on the detailed responsibility for leading this change.

If they decide not, then quality managers or champions must be chosen. These must:

- be confident that their leader is behind them and is willing and able to release the necessary resources, including time
- be able to win over their peers
- make sure that others outside a traditional line management structure come on board.

The quality leaders, whoever they may be, will also need insight into the scope and limits of their powers to implement change.

Understanding quality systems

There is no shortage of guidance and support on how to design and adapt quality frameworks, tools and systems (see Ewens and Watters 2002). It may be helpful to use a generic external framework, such as the Business Excellence Model.

In the context of change for quality the two most important principles to be understood and then transmitted are that:

- everyone in the service or partnership has a role to play
- the cycle must be completed. It is not enough to review, measure and report. Action and further review must follow.
Understanding how the service will be judged externally

The quality leader needs a clear understanding of what might be described as the ‘external agenda’, for example the requirements of:

- ALI inspection
- LSC process review
- Best Value review.

Quality improvement should not be undertaken with the sole objective of meeting the demands of these frameworks, but they do help to shape the internal systems and can be used to motivate staff.

Understanding the organisational culture and how to change it

Before attempting any changes, the quality leader needs to understand fully the current organisational culture and to what extent the service is already committed and aligned to the quality agenda. Insights may be gained through exploration of theories about how organisations’ cultures are formed and changed.

For example, at Runshaw College (Guardian Education, 20 January 2004), a leading-edge further education college, the need for profound change was revealed by a staff survey. This led to the recognition that it was necessary to address ‘the four soft Ss’ – staff culture, shared values, management style and skills – before tackling the ‘three hard Ss’ – systems, structures and strategies. The culture that eventually emerged, as a result of a long-term, highly effective holistic organisational approach to quality improvement, was characterised by clarity about what was expected of both staff and students. Runshaw College gained the UK Business Excellence Award in the public sector in 2002 and won the European version of the competition in 2003.

To create a quality culture, the quality leader must be able to communicate both the policy and the passion, as well as being able to explain why quality improvement is key, giving ‘win-win’ reasons. Everyone in the organisation, including the learners, would probably agree that they would like things to be better or to remain excellent. Commitment, time and resources have to be invested to make this happen, so the potential investors must be able to see what the benefits will be.
The quality leader must have customised answers for different staff and stakeholders – learners, the wider community, support staff, tutors and lecturers, managers, partners – when they question the value of change. One possible complaint may be that already hard-pressed people are being asked to do even more. While acknowledging this, it is important to make clear that some current activity may be unnecessary and could – or should – be given up.

**Developing a strategy**

There are two fundamental approaches to leading change for quality improvement:

- a holistic model, where an overt attempt is made to introduce a service-wide quality framework
- the incremental approach, where an area of necessary quality improvement is tackled and, when this is successfully implemented, the leader or team moves on to look at another related area.

The choice of strategy depends on the nature of the service and on leadership styles. Whichever strategy you choose, it must be appropriate to your organisation.

**The holistic model**

The case studies above (see pages 15–39) include several examples of quality leaders developing an overarching quality framework. However, developing and publishing a holistic framework does not necessarily ensure the cooperation of everyone working and learning in the service. This strategy only works with the involvement of representatives from all parts of the organisation. The strategy must be disseminated in a way that is digestible, relevant and doable, by dispersed quality champions using strategies to gain buy-in from those who resist compliance, particularly at middle-management level.

This is where the ‘win-win’ concept is important. You must show that quality improvement does not have to make more demands on our time nor divert us from the basics of teaching and learning. It should and must enhance learning and make life easier for staff too.
**The incremental approach**

If developing a comprehensive framework seems too difficult or inappropriate, the best strategy may be to start by identifying one key issue and acting on that. This activity may naturally spin off into other areas, such as mission review. Alternatively, once you have completed one area, then identify another area for development and move on to that next. Not surprisingly, leaders or teams often choose to focus on the observation of teaching and learning, getting their service to do this effectively – sometimes for the first time – as a tool for gaining wider quality improvement.

**Don't panic**

Be realistic about timescales. Awareness of impending inspection and regular performance review can engender a sense of panic, but not everything needs to be done right now. The transformational changes at Runshaw College (see page 50) took 10 years. As the case studies in this guide show, changing culture takes time.
Learning through change

Learning, by definition, brings about change. However, being involved in change does not necessarily result in learning – neither for individuals nor for organisations. When it does, it can help turn the challenge of frequent and rapid change to advantage, at both the personal (micro) and organisational (macro) levels.

Organisational learning can be construed simply as a technical process, where data is collected and regarded as ‘feedback’ about how systems and processes are operating. Errors or weaknesses can be detected and corrected. Further data analysis confirms that things are now back on track. This way of thinking about how organisations ‘learn’ echoes the ‘machine’ metaphor for how organisations work (see ‘How do we think about change?’ on pages 12–13).

Organisational learning can also be viewed as a social process, which takes in the interactions between people. Learning in this sense is situated and takes place within communities of practitioners. This concept of learning sits alongside the definition of learning by the American philosopher and educationist Dewey as ‘reflective experience’. It is linked to the idea of an organisation as a complex social system.

Can organisations learn other than when individuals and teams reflect and learn from their experiences separately and collectively and then turn that learning into action? When this process is part of a conscious and deliberate strategy for quality improvement, through a creative approach to self-assessment and action planning, organisations can be said to have learnt about strengths and weaknesses. Where there is careful evaluation of this learning process, to gain useful insights into how best the organisation can learn and improve, this can maximise the benefits of change. Learning how to learn, whether on the part of individuals or organisations, is a transformational process. Senge (1995) calls this ‘real learning’.

Organisational learning can, however, be seen in more pragmatic terms. Finger and Brand (1999), writing about organisational learning in the public sector, suggest that individual and collective learning must be combined and harnessed to bring about organisational learning.

Four factors can enable or inhibit such learning:

- structure
- culture
- the way work is organised (systems and procedures)
- the capacity of the leader to learn and to promote learning.
For example, structural arrangements can work against learning by teams that work across an organisation. A learning culture is unlikely when there is a tendency to blame people if things do not always work as planned – people who become risk-averse through fear are unlikely to experiment or innovate, so creativity is stifled. The way that work is organised can facilitate sharing and reflection on experience or can make this difficult. A leader who espouses the concept of a ‘learning organisation’ and seeks to create this is more likely to be successful if she or he is seen to be an active learner. It is important to acknowledge in an organisation that aspires to ‘learn’ that learning can occur as a result of mistakes or failed initiatives. An open and constructively self-critical culture needs to exist throughout the organisation.

A leader who seeks to create a learning culture needs first to create and then sustain the conditions for encouraging and supporting organisational learning. Leaders must:

- show in their actions as well as their words that they value learning
- be able to coach and mentor others
- accept criticism and alternative viewpoints
- demonstrate the ability to learn and grow themselves.

To paraphrase the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, change is inevitable. It is probably the only phenomenon of which we can be certain.

It won’t always be comfortable on the magic carpet of possibility. If we keep our destination in focus, stick to our values, listen to the music, maintain a sense of balance and take some creative and doughty colleagues along with us, then we are more likely to be able to enjoy the dance of change.
References and further reading


Useful websites

www.ALI.gov.uk
Adult Learning Inspectorate

www.centreforexcellence.org.uk
Centre for Excellence in Leadership

www.dfes.gov.uk
Department for Education and Skills

www.idea.gov.uk
Improvement and Development Agency

www.LSC.gov.uk
Learning and Skills Council

www.LSDA.org.uk
Learning and Skills Development Agency

www.niace.org.uk
National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education

www.qualityACL.org.uk
Adult and Community Learning Quality Support Programme

www.s4s.org.uk
Support for Success Quality Improvement Programme

www.successforall.gov.uk
Success For All (DfES and LSC)