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Editorial

I have a saying posted above my desk which says "Anything worth doing is going to take longer than you think". This first issue of The International Journal of HRD Practice Policy and Research has provided a perfect example! It has indeed been some time in gestation and I commend you to the short article by Bob Morton and Jim Stewart, in the HRD Viewpoint section, for a fuller account of how the partnership between IFTDO and UFHRD has finally brought the Journal to fruition. I want to focus in this editorial on the rationale for and the direction of the Journal. Let me begin with a short story of my own. I began my career in HR (or personnel management as it was then) with Cadburys, the world famous chocolate makers. An early posting was to the production night shift. Myself and another new graduate nervously attended our first production meeting before the shift commenced. Asked to introduce ourselves my colleague, perhaps naively in retrospect, chirped up with "I'm an Arts graduate from Bristol". The production manager, a tough no-nonsense bloke, who'd worked at Cadburys since before I was born, nearly choked with laughter but managed to proclaim "So what are you going to do paint the bloody place?!" Over the years since I often find myself thinking about this. It seems to me to capture a tension between the worlds of academia and practice; a sense of competing realities combined with unease and nervousness about how a synergistic relationship might be realised. I sensed it repeatedly during my long career with Leeds Met University, teaching professional HRD students. I sensed their difficulty with theory, with research, yet at the same time saw in some of their assignment work valuable contributions to both theory and practice, which were destined to be read by no more than a handful of other academics. A very recent reminder of such questions occurred when listening to Aidan Lawrence, Learning & Development Director for Hewlett Packard, Ireland. He presented a passionate 'business case' for an enhanced relationship between HRD research and practice at a recent UFHRD Conference. Aidan argued the need for a strengthening of research practice collaboration, seeing academia and practice as strategic partners in practice-research-practice learning cycles.

The rationale for the Journal is firmly located in such a discourse yet clarity about the implications — what will it look like — will take time to emerge. One of my Editorial Board colleagues, Jamie Callahan, puts it nicely when she says we are "crafting a new language" because we have nothing that adequately addresses this ground. She suggests the tension I speak of above is best described as a continuum. A continuum from scholar, through to scholar-practitioner (scholar who practices), practitioner-scholar (practitioner who engages in scholarship), scholarly practitioner (practitioner who is interested in and uses scholarly work to inform their practice but doesn't do the research themselves), and finally to practitioners. We have excellent journals that speak the language of the first two; and there are excellent trade journals that speak to the last one. We want to accomplish the challenging task of speaking to the middle three, while hoping to move more practitioners to become scholarly practitioners. This "crafting of a language" that speaks to those populations, Jamie notes "is work in progress ... and our first issue reflects that condition".

Let me at this point introduce this first issue. Bob Hamlin's passion for evidence based HRD is ably illustrated in the lead article. Indeed, I have described his contribution to others as an evidence based article about evidence based HRD! So, hopefully a good start in dispelling myths and doubts about the potential of academic practice partnerships in developing our understanding of HRD and its impact. Academic practice partnership is also a feature of the second article, where Jeff Gold explores how the leadership of organizations (one private sector one public) have sought to take a new and inclusive approach to the 'old chestnut' of culture change. The clue is use in the title of the

word "Re-connecting". It is an account of practice which argues how leaders can 're-discover' their organizations and use this as basis for learning to lead organizational change. The Journal is the international journal of HRD practice, policy and research. Erica Smith draws on her research with the International Labour Organization and a number of Australian companies to address policy principles in terms of managing apprenticeship. This serves as an excellent article in its own right but also one enables me to flag the importance we are placing on such policy reflections as a feature of the Journal. Whether principally 'national HRD' focused (skills, graduates, qualifications) or issues regarding 'corporate HRD' strategy both have important place in the Journal's coverage. From Australia, the latter three articles take us to Oman, Saudi Arabia and then back to the UK. Paul Turner and Alison Glaister, together with their Omanian colleague Rayya Al-Amri, focus on what must be one of the most talked about HRD practices in current times - talent management. In the context of Omanisation (a challenging HRD policy in its own right) the authors apply a talent management evolution matrix to assess practice in two key sectors of the Omani economy. Whether Roland Yeo and his colleagues are best described as 'practitioner scholars' or 'scholar practitioners' may be a debateable point. What is encouraging is that Saudi Aramco were happy for Roland and his colleagues to write up their work on team-based knowledge sharing in the business. Again, the clue to the value of their paper is in the sub-title: "Learning through complex work challenges". The authors are 'insider researchers', tackling HRD processes that can unlock knowledge and understanding about work problems through team learning. The final article in this first issue takes us into world of the UKs national health service. Adam Turner, a practitioner within the NHS, and Lynn Nichol, his 'academic' partner explore development assessment centres. But, interestingly, their focus is the voice of the participant of such HRD interventions. The insights generated have challenging implications for HRD policy and practice.

An HRD Viewpoints section follows these substantive contributions. It is a space where we hope to encourage dialogue and debate about HRD, through a variety of shorter contributions. It might be a short practice review on how a new initiative has been developed / implemented; a view on a proposed or recently implemented national HRD policy or a reflection on the development of HRD as a function and/or a profession. In this first issue Sophie Mills and Amanda Lee look back on their — at times very challenging — research project on comparative global HRD practice. A final contribution asks tough questions about HRD's role in a world of work dominated by robotics and automation.

A final word about the Editorial Board and the Editorial Advisory Board. The former is responsible for the overall management of the Journal, reporting to the Journal's governing body on overall progress and development. The latter adds professional integrity and standing to the Journal and act as advisers to the Editorial Board on matters of Journal development, the two boards, together, represent an excellent cross section of HRD interest around the world. I thank them for their support to date and look forward to working with them as we 'craft the language' of the new Journal and seek to establish its credentials.

HRD is not going to stand still — it is a shifting landscape. The Journal has a role in reflecting how HRD is developing but also in influencing its development. Anyone who views him/ herself as an HRD professional has a contribution to make to this Journal. So, I conclude with a warm invitation to all readers to help the Journal meet its aspirations.

Dr Rick Holden, Editor in Chief

HRD and Organizational Change: Evidence-Based Practice

Bob Hamlin, *University of Wolverhampton, UK*

Most HRD practitioners are, or wish to become, actively involved as strategic business partners of managers, particularly with respect to helping them bring about effective and beneficial organizational change within their own organizations, or within host organizations. This article discusses the complexities of HRD related process issues in the effective management of organizational change, and the value of using HRD-related theory, change management-related theory, and/or academically rigorous internal in-company research to help inform, shape, and evaluate the change agency practice of HRD professionals and the managers they partner. Following a discussion of why many organizational change programmes fail, the author argues that 'evidence-based HRD' geared to the strategic thrust of the business will likely lead to the HRD function maximizing its contribution to organizational effectiveness and sustainable business success. Two UK case examples of evidence-based HRD are presented, followed by a discussion of the worth of 'professional partnership' research and empirical generalization 'replication' research.

Introduction

This article has three aims. The first is to highlight the critical role that HRD practitioners could or should play as strategic business partners of managers in the management of organizational change (OC), and the concomitant necessity of robust change management enhancing research. The second is to present evidence supporting the case for HRD practitioners and managers to consider investing in context-specific OC-related research within their own organizations in order to improve their change-agency effectiveness; and to consider conducting such research in collaboration with academics within 'professional partnership' arrangements to ensure the rigour, robustness, and reliability of the findings. The third aim is to argue the case for empirical generalization 'replication' research that focuses on context-general OC-related field problems experienced in multiple specific organizational settings, and/or across organizational sectors and nations, in support of evidence-based HRD and evidence-based organizational change-agency practice. Stewart (2015) has argued that HRD practitioners are change agents who help and partner with managers in the facilitation of organizational change programmes within their own or host organizations. Together with other writers, Stewart claims that HRD is a strategic function that can have a significant impact on the long term business success of organizations (see Stewart and McGoldrick, 1996; Fredericks and Stewart, 1996). Furthermore, Gold, Holden, Iles, Stewart and Beardwell (2009) argue that HRD in practice and theory has a major influence on the interplay of leadership, culture, and employee commitment through: (i) helping to develop current and future leaders; (ii) involvement in shaping the organizational culture; (iii) building commitment among organization members; and (iv) anticipating required managerial responses to changing conditions. Similarly, McKenzie, Garavan and Carbery (2012) observed that "the shift from operational and tactical HRD to strategic HRD has witnessed a metamorphosis for HRD practitioners increasingly becoming partners in the business tasked with aligning people, strategy, and performance rather than simply promoting learning and development" (p.354). This observation echoes Kohut and Roth's (2015) claim that "HRD practitioners and scholars need

to enter the fray of the discussion on change management" (p.231). Over the last three decades of the twentieth century, the need for managers to initiate and facilitate organizational change management programmes effectively and beneficially has continued to increase in frequency, pace, and complexity (see Hamlin, Keep and Ash, 2001). In this context a major challenge facing modern day HRD practitioners is how best to help their colleague managers in this endeavour. Unfortunately, many OC programmes fail because both managers and HRD professionals find themselves unable to rise to the challenge that change brings. Consistent with the three aims outlined above, this article addresses the problematic issue of bringing about strategic organizational change successfully. It does so by discussing and illustrating the contribution that good collaborative replication HRD research can make in support of HRD and organizational change agency practice. The specific purposes are as follows:

(i) To discuss the reasons why organizational change programmes fail.

(ii) To make the case that HRD practitioners and managers should become evidence-based in their organizational change agency practice.

(iii) To outline certain obstacles to 'evidence-based HRD', 'evidence-based management' and 'evidence-based organizational change agency'.

(iv) To discuss how these obstacles may be overcome through HRD 'professional partnership' research and empirical generalization 'replication' research, respectively.

Why Do Organizational Change Programmes Fail?

The success rate of planned organizational change strategies over the past 30 years has been dismal with two thirds or more OC programmes having failed to achieve their intended aims (Burnes, 2004; Choi and Ruona, 2011; Szabla, 2007). This failure is surprising bearing in mind the plethora of advice and guidance on the 'how to' of change management. Most change management models on offer follow Lewin's 'unfreeze-move-refreeze' process, and although they differ in varying ways, all include a common 'step by step' approach as depicted in a generic 'composite' model offered by the author (see Hamlin, 2001a; Hamlin, 2002). The model is comprised of six steps as follows:

Stage 1 Diagnose/explore the present state and identify the required future state.

Stage 2 Create a strategic vision.

Stage 3 Plan the change strategy.

Stage 4 Secure ownership, commitment and involvement including top management support.

Stage 5 Project manage the implementation of the change strategy and sustain momentum.

Stage 6 Stabilize, integrate and consolidate to ensure perpetuation of the change.

It is assumed that HRD practitioners and managers possess the requisite knowledge, attitude, and skills to apply the model effectively. However, according to Shook and Roth (2011) the failure rate of organizational change programmes is around 70% irrespective of whether they are driven by 'mergers', 'acquisitions', 'downsizing', 'de-layering', 'IT', 'total quality management',

'business process re-engineering', or 'culture change' initiatives, and this failure rate suggests they do not. Based on his review of organizational change management studies from various researchers in the US, the UK, and in various other European countries, the author identified over 15 years ago six underlying root causes or 'failings' of managers and HRD practitioners which explain in part why OC programmes fail (Hamlin, 2001a). Five of these failings relate to managers:

Failing 1 Managers not knowing the fundamental principles of change management.

Failing 2 Managers succumbing to the temptations of the 'quick fix' or 'simple solution.

Failing 3 Managers not fully appreciating the significance of the leadership and cultural aspects of change.

Failing 4 Managers not appreciating sufficiently the significance of the people issues.

Failing 5 Managers not knowing the critical contribution that the HRD function can make to the management of change.

Failing 6 Trainers and developers lacking credibility in the eyes of line managers.

Regarding Failing 5, many managers regard training and development as an undesirable cost that can only be afforded when profits and/or funding are plentiful, rather than as an investment which the organization can ill-afford not to make even in the toughest of times, and especially during periods of transformational change. Yet if managers are to be in control of change they must ensure they are in control of the knowledge, attitude and skill issues associated with change itself. This means giving sufficient time and attention to the 'soft' people-oriented HRD aspects of the change management process. Regarding Failing 6, for decades many if not most HRD practitioners have lacked high 'credibility' with line managers. For some this has not been helped by being part of HR departments which have also lacked status due to: (i) the dominant focus on personnel administration, and (ii) line managers being frustrated by HR staff who show little understanding of business, are too rigid, and who invariably seem to say 'no' when managers need their help to find ways to make things work (Hamlin, 2001a; Cardillo, 2012). Thus, managers place low role expectations on most HR professionals (Thornhill, Lewis, Millmore, and Saunders; 2000; Ulrich, 1997), and by association also on HRD professionals. Additionally, this lack of credibility can be exacerbated in countries such as the USA where HRD-related postgraduate professional qualifications programmes offered by universities are predominantly delivered by Schools of Education, rather than by Schools of Business or Management as in the UK. In those countries HRD professionals are often perceived more as 'adult educationalists' or 'specialized teachers', rather than as 'people and organization development consultants'. Consequently, it behoves HRD practitioners to concern themselves with the mainstream business and management of organizations if they are to maximize their contribution to organizational effectiveness and sustainable business success (see Stewart and Hamlin, 1990).

The way of achieving this is to engage in a change management process by: (i) conducting organization wide 'health' checks to identify required changes and the associated learning and development needs of managers and non managerial employees at the organizational, group, and individual level, (ii) providing 'expert' advice on how best to meet these needs; (iii) recommending or taking the requisite action, and/or responding to needs resulting from 'top down' OC initiatives; and (iv) developing the skills and abilities of managers to manage change

effectively and to cope effectively with any unintended consequences of the planned changes. However, much depends on the extent to which they can improve their 'credibility' in the eyes of line managers. Hence, HRD practitioners need to 'sell' their potential as valued strategic business partners of managers and in particular the distinctive contribution they can make in formulating and implementing organizational change programmes.

Evidence-Based HRD and Organizational Change

The notion that HRD is a strategic function and that HRD practitioners are agents of change who work in strategic business partnership with line managers is consistent with Phillips and Shaw's (1989) call for trainers to develop into the roles of 'training consultant, 'learning consultant' and 'organization change consultant'. However, as previously argued by the author, to become truly expert, HRD practitioners need to use the findings of high quality management-related and HRD-related research to inform, shape, and evaluate the effectiveness of their consultancy and change agency practice (Hamlin, 2001). The author and other writers have since reinforced this view by arguing that they need to reflect critically and become evidence-based (Hamlin, 2007; Holton, 2004; Kearns, 2014). Similarly, calls have been made for managers to enhance their professional practice by becoming research-informed and evidence-based (see Axelsson, 1998; Briner, Denyer and Rousseau, 2009; Latham, 2009, Pfeffer and Sutton, 2006; Rousseau, 2006, 2012; Stewart, 1998). Drawing upon evidence-based practice approaches in other fields, the types of 'best evidence' that could be used to support *evidence-based human resource development* could, and in the author's view should, include: (i) Mode 1 research which is about testing theory and generating conceptual knowledge, (ii) Mode 2 research which is about generating instrumental knowledge to resolve real-life/work-based problems, and in some cases developing mid-range theory, and (iii) descriptive studies or the consensus view of a body of field experts. As in medicine, 'best evidence' does not need to be comprised solely of findings from positivist 'normal science' studies (Kuhn, 1996, p.5). Indeed, findings from any type of good quality research can be used, whether quantitative or qualitative. Such studies may be based either (i) on the paradigmatic assumptions, methodologies, and methods privileged by any one of the main research paradigms, namely: '*Positivism/Functionalism*'; '*Post positivism/Radical structuralism*'; '*Critical-idealogical/Radical humanism*' and '*Constructivism-interpretivism*', or (ii) on the philosophical assumptions associated with pragmatism and Morgan's (2007) 'pragmatic approach' which allows the researcher to adopt whichever paradigmatic assumptions are considered best for achieving the research objectives (see also Hamlin, 2015). In addition, the on-going findings and insights on practice gained from *action research* can also be considered as a form of 'best evidence'.

An important feature of evidence-based change agency is the notion of *critical reflection*. For the author, the significance of this notion was reinforced 15 years or so ago by the 'reflections on practice' case histories' of 18 of his *MSc in HRD and Organizational Change* alumni, all of whom were HRD practitioners who, as part of their MSc programme at the University of Wolverhampton-UK, had helped managers within their own organization or in a host company to bring about effectively and beneficially an identified desired strategic organizational change (see Hamlin, Keep, and Ash, 2001). Some of them had incorporated *action research* as an integral component of the facilitated change management process. The insights gained from their respective 'reflective case histories' led the author to offer a definition for what he called '*research-informed HRD*'.

Research-informed HRD is the conscientious and explicit use of research findings and the research process to inform, shape, measure and evaluate professional practice (Hamlin, 2002: p.98).

That HRD practitioners and also the managers they help should become 'critically reflective' and 'evidence-based' is compelling, particularly bearing in mind the increasing paradoxes, contradictions, and complexities of organizational life which complicate the task of facilitating OC programmes efficiently and effectively (Hatton, 2001; Vince, 2014). This should involve taking action to (i) make sense of the organization and understand better what is going on; (ii) develop suitable OC strategies; (iii) implement these OC strategies effectively; (iv) critically evaluate the change process and its effectiveness; and (iv) draw lessons for the future by reflecting critically upon their individual practice as agents of change.

Some writers suggest the tasks associated with change management processes are usually obvious, and that there is nothing intellectually demanding or difficult about the management of organizational change (Rogers, Shannon, and Gent, 2003). However, people and organizations are far more complex than is often inferred from much of the change management literature. Furthermore, the many 'solutions' offered for resolving organizational change management 'problems' can be more difficult to comprehend and implement than is often claimed by 'experts'. Hence, evidence-based HRD practitioners working with colleague managers would do well to use not only the generalized '*conceptual knowledge for understanding*' that emerges from the findings of conventional Mode 1 research, but also to instigate and/or collaboratively conduct internal Mode 2 research in order to generate *instrumental knowledge for action* that has optimum relevance and utility. Engagement in good quality Mode 2 applied research is likely to lead to a better understanding of the particular complexities, contradictions, and paradoxes that may affect or are affecting the change management processes and the effectiveness of the change agency practice. They would also do well to consider building into their change management processes sufficient time for critical reflection. From such reflection new theoretical insights may emerge which can explain the success or failure of particular aspects of their OC programme. Informed by a critical review of their own change agency contribution, 'new ways' and 'lay theories' for approaching problems of change confronting them may also emerge. The practical significance of in-house Mode 2 research to solve context-specific work-based problems should not be underestimated.

In summary, HRD practitioners and managers who use good Mode 1 and/or Mode 2 research to inform, shape, and evaluate their change agency practices are more likely to be effective in bringing about beneficially planned organizational change that delivers the intended desired end-state outcomes, instead of the more usual undesired and/or unintended outcomes. However, a major obstacle to becoming evidence-based is the continuing sparseness of 'best evidence' that can be drawn upon to support evidence-based management and HRD practice.

What Types of Research Are Useful in Support of Evidence-Based HRD and Organizational Change?

The challenges of becoming an 'evidence-based practitioner' are discussed in this section, including the need to determine the types of research topics and approaches that are most likely to be of greatest utility to evidence-based HRD practitioners and line managers seeking to improve their change agency practice. Of importance to all organizational change agents is the need to understand in sufficient depth the people and organization related factors that need to

be improved and changed, including critical aspects of the prevailing *organizational culture*, *management culture*, and *leadership* that can either help or hinder the organizational change management process. The small body of existing 'best evidence' can provide valuable context-general knowledge to inform the formulation of a change strategy, regardless of the specificities of a particular organizational setting. For example, various researchers have explored 'employee resistance to change' (see Garcia-Cabrera, and Hernandez, 2014; Szabla, 2007) and 'employee readiness for change' (see Choi and Ruona, 2011); whilst others have explored the related issue of *organizational dynamics* that can impact positively or negatively on the organizational change process. For instance, Vince (2014) investigated the specific issues of *emotion*, *power relations*, and *political dynamics* which are factors that can enhance or inhibit learning and development, and thereby support or undermine the effectiveness of the planned OC programme.

Extant generalized knowledge can help only so far in identifying and understanding better the many paradoxes, contradictions and complexities that limit the success of so many OC programmes. Hence, HRD practitioners and managers should consider commissioning and/or conducting *context-specific/case-specific* internal research as part of their change agency. When conducted with academic rigour, such OC related research can lead to deep seated fundamental issues about the running of the organization being surfaced and confronted. Examples might include those ineffective aspects of managerial/organizational culture, or specific managerial and employee behaviour that impede or block innovation and change. The results of internal research projects that are recognized by people within the organization as being relevant, rigorous, and of a high ethical standard, are likely to 'strike a chord'. As a result, both managers and non-managerial employees are more likely to accept the evidence of ineffective features of organizational life that impact negatively, or are likely to impact negatively, on the OC process, including their own individual performance or behavioural deficiencies. Additionally, they are more likely to advance personal opinions, reactions, and 'theories' that would otherwise not be revealed. This type of research can generate the 'hard' empirical evidence required to reveal and accurately reflect back to the organization the truth and realities of organizational life, and thereby help surface organizational taboos or latent and un-discussed sensitive issues that should be addressed (Bruce and Wyman, 1998; Pfeffer and Sutton, 2006). Engaging with and using such research can enable HRD practitioners and managers to become fully effective as evidence-based change agents.

Overcoming the Obstacles to Evidence-Based HRD and Organizational Change

As previously mentioned, there is a paucity of generalized HRD-related research that can unreservedly be translated and transferred to organizations, organizational sectors, or countries beyond the original location of the study. Therefore, until this deficiency of Mode 1 research-generated theory is rectified over time by HRD scholars, HRD practitioners and colleague managers wishing to operate as evidence-based change agents will, out of sheer necessity, have to instigate and/or engage with Mode 2 research within their own organizations. The results of such research can then be used to inform, shape and critically evaluate the way they practice as agents of change. As well as *action research* and also *critical action learning* which Vince (2008) and other writers advocate, the author has personally experienced the merits of '*professional partnership*' research and empirical generalization '*replication*' research. The relevance, utility, and value of both of these approaches to research are discussed and illustrated next.

Professional Partnership Research

According to Jacobs (1997) 'professional partnership' research is carried out between a university and a collaborating organization with scholars and practitioners jointly conducting programmes of research that are focused on work-based problems of concern to management. However, in doing so they operate with their own mutually exclusive yet complementary goals. Of critical importance is the need to maintain the integrity of both sets of goals for the common good. A dual goal at the very outset of the study is to strive to generate empirical evidence that can be used reliably to help bring about required change within the organization through the application of academically rigorous research, whilst at the same time generating new insights capable of advancing knowledge in the field of HRD and management. Depending upon the particular focus and purpose of the research, the results may be used to inform the OC programme design, and/or to evaluate it prior to a redesign that may be required at each iterative stage of the planned change management process until the desired end-state has been reached. The author has participated as the HRD scholar partner within several professional partnership research studies in various UK public, private, and third (non-profit) sector organizations. These were either instigated by him or the respective HRD practitioner partner. The results of all of these studies have been reported in various academic journals and/or at international research conferences held in Europe and North America. Each study generated *instrumental knowledge* that the respective HRD practitioner partners subsequently used directly or indirectly to inform and shape an HRD-related intervention, or to critically evaluate an aspect of HR or management policy and practice within their respective organizations. Two case examples of this type of collaborative inquiry are presented below to illustrate the nature and impact of 'professional partnership' research. The respective research focus and goal, and where the results of the study have been published, are described briefly. In addition, and in both cases, the practical relevance and impact of the research within the two respective collaborating organizations are illustrated though 'testimonial evidence' provided by the respective HRD practitioner partner or partners.

Case Testimonial 1

HM Customs and Excise: (Anglia Region)

This collaborative replication study of perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness was commissioned by the Collector (Executive Head Dick Shepherd) of the Anglia Region of HM Customs and Excise-a major department of the British Civil Service. The study was carried out jointly by the author and Dick Shepherd's Research Officer (and OD Consultant) — Margaret Reidy who respectively acted as the HRD scholar and HRD practitioner in the partnership. The research took place from 1994 to 1998, during which period Margaret Reidy was also undertaking a parallel programme of qualitative ethnographic longitudinal doctoral research on cultural change. Details of this replicated managerial behaviour research, and the impact of applying the results in practice, have been published in several conference proceedings and academic journals (see Hamlin, Reidy, & Stewart, 1998; Hamlin, & Reidy, 2005).

Extract from Personal Testimonial of Dick Shepherd

I was accountable to the Board of Customs and Excise for achieving operational targets within the region. To cope with the demands for ever-increasing outputs and for more openness in our dealings with the public I needed to change the culture of the organization. I used seminars, walking the floor, publishing my Expectations document and was making progress and lifting

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outputs. But I felt that I did not really know how deep the changes were penetrating — there was always an element of telling me what I wanted to hear in the feedback I was receiving. I commissioned the critical incident/factor analytic research [on managerial and leadership effectiveness] from Bob Hamlin at Wolverhampton University, [and it was] my initial hope to find the patterns of strengths and weaknesses among the managers and team leaders. The results exceeded my expectations for I felt I was getting the real behaviours and attitudes prevalent in all the various parts of the organization for the first time. I was able to use the emerging results very quickly at my annual management conference where it made a big impact. This was no consultant's abstract interpretation using the latest business management technique. This was real. This was us. I had a profile of the attitudes and behaviours in the organization for the first time based on fact rather than intuition. A key factor right through this whole process was the close partnership between me and the research team. The clear understanding was that the research should be carried out independently with rigour and integrity to as high an academic quality as was necessary to provide provable results. My part was to commission it, facilitate its freedom in operation, and ensure that the [research process and] results were directly related to the working life of the Department. In fact the research team went on to develop a set of (management) competencies that we were able to use in our local appraisal system to improve managerial effectiveness. They also developed specifically targeted team building and managerial effectiveness workshops.

R.C. Shepherd

Date: 21 May 2002

Extract from Personal Testimonial of the HRD Practitioner Partner — Margaret Reidy

The data that resulted from the professional partnership-research "was so rich that its preliminary findings were immediately and effectively used by Dick Shepherd and me to inform and shape a number of OCD/HRD interventions for managing the (organizational) change, including workshops and local initiatives" … "The preliminary findings helped people to assess their behaviours and attitudes in newer and more in-depth ways". This was invaluable to the everyday work of the organization as managers could effectively identify and curtail or harness those behaviours (*associated with effective or ineffective management respectively*). This was achieved with the support of [OD/HRD] tools developed from the research findings to improve the rapidly transforming organization. The finalized data took this further. As a direct result of the managerial [and leadership] effectiveness research, a new set of behavioural management competencies were developed exclusively for the organization" … "The findings of the overall research [i.e. the ethnographic 'cultural change' study and replication 'managerial behaviour' study], that were both positive and negative in terms of people's attitudes and behaviours, were accepted in a highly positive manner by the (*Anglia*) people. The reason for acceptance was because the research had been conducted in an impartial and objective manner, and names were never used. This created, on the whole, trust between the interviewers and the interviewees and elicited interest and co-operation in the research on a wide scale". Over the four years of study and practical application "the research found that the culture was adapting and changing in a very real and measurable sense. This was reassuring for the management (*in particular for Dick Shepherd*) who had doubted that cultural change could be effectively measured. The research also helped to prove to management that an in depth knowledge of their organizational culture was one of the most effective tools in organizational change. It became understood that cultural change was not a 'soft issue', but an integral practical issue with very real rewards in bringing about successful organizational change".

Margaret Reidy Date: June, 2002

It should be noted that both cases are replication studies of *perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness* using the same research design, methodology and method as adopted in the previous replication studies cited above. As will be appreciated, the findings of the HM Customs and Excise (Anglia Region) case were used in support of an evidence-based OC initiative designed to improve the organization's managerial culture, whereas the findings of the 'TLFN' case were used to guide a specific evidence-based HRD initiative concerned with executive leader development. In both cases, the academic credentials of the findings resulting from the 'professional partnership' studies contributed greatly to the research being accepted as relevant, reliable, applicable, and useful by people within the two respective organizations. A highly significant lesson learned from these two cases is that HRD initiatives informed by empirical evidence derived from good internal ('home grown') academically rigorous research-the results of which managers and employees find hard to discount or ignore-are likely to be more effective than initiatives guided by 'prescriptive solutions' offered in textbooks or by outside consultants.

Case Testimonial 2

TLFN Group plc

The organization in which this collaborative professional-partnership research took place is a large UK-based multi-national retail telecommunications company which is referred to as TLFN Group PLC. The aim was to explore managerial culture at the executive leader level of the company to gain a better understanding of it. The results and their application have been published in a management related academic journal (see Hamlin & Sawyer, 2007).

Personal Testimonial of the HRD Practitioner Partner — Jenni Sawyer

The trigger for this research was the need to conduct a research project as part of the MSc in HRD and Organizational Change study programme that I was undertaking at the University of Wolverhampton Business School. At the time I was employed within the HR department of TLFN Group PLC. I chose to conduct a replication study of 'managerial and leadership effectiveness', and I found the extensive experience and knowledge gained through the process of selecting this research topic and methods of great benefit when it came to building a business case for conducting the research within my organization. This was a highly commercial environment, so it was important that I was able to demonstrate a projected return on that investment in time and resource. Following the identified need for a 'one-company' organizational and management approach, we needed to acquire a better understanding of the evolving culture within our UK business, as reflected by the behaviour of senior people. The key aim was to identify a set of behavioural criteria of managerial and leadership effectiveness that reflected 'best practice' within the company. The findings of the research challenged various aspects of the existing company-wide competency framework and raised a number of important questions to be explored. Most significantly 'customer focus' was found to be so core to the culture and values that the associated behaviours had become inherent and were therefore no longer recognised by senior people as indicators of managerial and leadership effectiveness. The findings were used to inform and shape the ongoing development of the company's Executive Leader Development Programme. This research-informed programme was then planned to be applied across Europe.

Jenny Sawyer Senior HR Manager: TLFN Group plc (when the research took place)

Date 25 October 2013

Replication Research

The author's long term goal when engaging as the HRD scholar partner in the two illustrative cases outlined above, and also in all previous and subsequent replication studies, has been to search for evidence of universalistic or generic *behavioural criteria of perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness*. The approach used has been informed by the notion of derived etic research (Berry, 1989) which is based on replication logic and multiple cross case comparative analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989). Consequently, each newly instigated replication study has replicated as closely as possible an earlier replication study carried out in the same organizational sector, thereby maximizing the comparability of the generated findings. This type of inquiry is consistent with what Tsang and Kwan (1999) have referred to as *empirical generalization* replication research, in which the same phenomenon experienced in multiple contexts is explored using the same research focus, philosophical perspective, methodology, and methods in order ultimately to develop mid-range theory. It is also consistent with van Aken's (2009) notion of design science in the field of management. This type of research is primarily aimed at developing 'general substantive and procedural design science' to solve common 'field problems' within a particular discipline/field. However, van Aken claims the notion can also be used in the explanatory sciences to develop 'general solution concepts' and mid-range theory that can be used in multiple organizational contexts beyond the ones where the empirical research has been carried out; albeit limited in validity to that particular applied field or domain of practice (van Aken, 2007). For a more detailed explanation of design science and HRD research see Sadler-Smith (2015). Using the findings from the two cases illustrated above, together with the author's replication studies in other organizations, Hamlin and Hatton (2013) have identified through multiple cross-case and cross-sector comparative analysis an emergent *British taxonomy of perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness*. Similarly, Patel and Hamlin (2012) have identified an emergent *EU related taxonomy* derived from replication studies in Germany, Romania and the UK. Both taxonomies could be used as 'best evidence' to support HRD intervention in various organizations similar to those outlined in the above illustrative case testimonials. Additionally they could be used by management and leadership development (MLD) practitioners to maximize their contribution to improving organizational effectiveness and performance through planned initiatives focused on the training and development of managers and leaders. Such evidence-based MLD interventions are more likely to result in the development of the style of 'leadership' and type of 'culture' that are most likely to be conducive to learning and effective organizational change agency, than those that typically persist following investment in conventional MLD programmes.

Discussion

The prime message of this article for HRD practitioners and HRD scholars is that by becoming critically reflective and evidence-based by using research to inform and evaluate practice, and by engaging in 'professional partnership' research, they will more likely: (i) make an important and valued contribution to the bridging of the much discussed 'research-practice gap' in the fields of HRD and management, and (ii) maximize their contribution to organizational effectiveness and long term business success. However, these contributions are unlikely to become a reality for HRD practitioners unless: (i) they can help line managers to overcome the five OCD 'failings' outlined earlier in this article, and (ii) they take the necessary steps to improve significantly their 'credibility' with managers so that they become welcomed as strategic business partners.

Herein lies a major challenge for MLD and other HRD practitioners who train, develop, and coach/mentor managers, and also for HRD scholars in universities who teach on management and HRD-related professional qualification programmes such as Master level degree courses in management, leadership, organizational change, OD, and HRD (see Hamlin, 2002). Hence, to increase their impact and effectiveness this author suggests that HRD scholars should consider: (i) incorporating 'evidence-based practice' into their everyday teaching; and (ii) being more open to Mode 2 research conducted in collaboration with HRD practitioners — rather than engaging solely with Mode 1 research. In so doing, it is recommended that they consider focusing some of their research effort into studying specific work-based 'research problems' of particular interest to managers and HRD practitioners in multiple organizations, sectors or even countries (what van Aken (2007) refers to as design science 'field problems') and for such studies to be conducted in 'professional partnership' arrangements whenever possible. Additionally, HRD scholars might also consider adopting 'replication (*empirical generalization*) research' approaches in partnership with HRD scholars in other universities and/or in other countries, for the purpose of exploring a particular 'field problem' that engages their common interest. In so doing, their joint aim would be the identification of geocentric/context-general concepts and constructs, and if possible the development of universalistic theories through 'replication logic' and 'multiple cross-case comparative analysis'. An important message for top managers and business/organizational leaders resulting from the case for 'professional partnership' and 'replication' research presented in this article is that they are more likely to grow and optimize organizational capability and flexibility in a context of ongoing change, and thereby create high performance organizations that deliver sustainable business success if they: (i) give greater consideration to the 'soft' stuff of management when formulating organizational change strategies; (ii) allow line managers who implement the OC strategies to have sufficient time to attend to the 'soft' human side issues involved in the change management process; (iii) give recognition to the value of evidence-based management and evidence-based HRD approaches in bringing about effective and beneficial strategic organizational change and development: and (iv) sponsor 'professional partnership' research projects focused on 'real-live' organization-based problems or issues of concern.

In conclusion, this author strongly urges HRD professionals and line managers who wish to maximize their contribution to the effective and beneficial facilitation of organizational change (and development), to give serious consideration to the concepts of evidence-based HRD and evidence-based management.

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Reconnecting Leaders to Organization Cultures

Jeff Gold, *York St John University, UK*

The article begins with a challenge to the view that leaders = leadership, suggesting that leadership can be found through patterns of working in which people exert influence on what is happening. Such patterns create difficulties for appointed leaders when they seek to bring about cultural change. The article then explores how leaders can tackle the difficulty of culture change through the use of action learning combined with appreciative inquiry where the latter focuses on conversations to find out what works well in organizations. Ongoing work from examples from two organizations are presented. The first, Company X sought to shift culture in response to the need to re-align strategy to build relationships more directly with consumers. The second, PublicBody, faced funding difficulties and a recent survey of staff opinions and attitudes had revealed a lowering of morale and engagement. In both cases, leaders used conversations with their staff to find examples of 'really good work practice'. Findings were then shared in an action learning group to identify patterns and consider actions for improvement. The process allows leaders to set up further action learning groups to support further conversations which reveal further patterns of what is working.

Introduction

Many leaders and many organizations have sought to bring about a change or a shift in culture. In response to apparent dramatic changes in markets, technologies and funding regimes, leaders can become concerned that policies and procedures can be changed but unless there are also changes in underpinning values, beliefs and behaviours, the effect can be less than desirable. Researchers on changing organization cultures have known about this discrepancy for years. For example, Mats Alvesson and Stefan Sveningsson (2008) point to the tension between what is said, especially by leaders and managers, and what is actually done and experienced in the thoughts and feelings of those who are meant to change.

One of the most important difficulties is evident in the assumptions of leaders themselves. For example, it is relatively easy to fall into a way of thinking that everyone else has the same interest and concerns about the current and future direction of the organization as the leaders. That is, there is mostly unity among the staff. By contrast, it is probably the case that there are different versions about what is happening and what is considered the right or wrong thing to do. Such differences point to a less unified and more fragmented picture of an organization, reflecting the existence of several cultures and multiple values. This variation can make change and culture shift a very difficult problem.

In this article, the intention is to show how leaders can learn to understand the variety of cultures within their organizations. The vehicle to create such understanding is an approach to action learning, which brings more people into a process to progress the desired shift. If leaders participate in the journey, they will begin to bring different cultures closer together. Examples will be drawn from work in two organizations which are seeking to shift cultures.

The Fog of Leadership

Walk into any organization that is not yours and conduct a simple act of inquiry. For the first five people you encounter, ask them the following question:

Where is leadership?

The author cannot possibly tell you the answers you will get but suspects that, after an initial confusion, you might find a variety of responses ranging from the man or woman 'at the top' to interesting stories about the influence of others in the organization or others who have been in the organization, possibly from the past. What may be surprising is that the responses may provide a challenge to a commonly stated identity, that is:

Leaders = Leadership

This suggests that a very simple view of leadership is to see the people at the top as the leaders. This then makes it relatively easy to attribute the success of organizations and failure to particular individuals. They are heroes when things work and villains when they don't. It also means that stories of success about Jack Welch and Richard Branson can be presented for others to consume. Individual attribution might also work in reverse when there is failure, such as with Enron and the more recent Global Financial Crisis. However, there does seem to be some reticence as well.

Seeing leadership as the leaders has been a pre-occupation of people in organizations, including those in learning and development who are charged with training current and future leaders. The assumption is made that if the key features of what makes a good leader can be found, and this includes the need for a link to successful performance, then the training can be done. This has resulted in a very well developed industry of leadership development suppliers of toolkits and programmes. One of the most well-known and used tools in the toolkit is a framework of competences, sometimes called attributes or behaviours. The frameworks provide a simple argument for assessing, developing and measuring leaders. One does wonder how such frameworks were operating when decisions were made that took organizations into the danger zones of the late 2000s.

When it comes to the most prominent frameworks for leaders, the notion of transformational and charismatic leadership still holds sway. This is in spite of the fact that a very serious and rigorous consideration by van Knippenberg and Sitkin (2013) of the evidence for transformational leadership and the link to organization performance. They found so many problems both with understanding the idea of charismatic transformation leadership and how to measure and use it, that they suggested 'going back to the drawing board'. So where do you go next?

One of the first moves suggested is to break the equation of leaders = leadership. There are leaders who are appointed to key positions of responsibility and are accountable for the working of an organization. But here's the rub — leaders may have a duty to lead but leadership may not be entirely in their control. Indeed in any organization, even in small organizations, there are a variety of ways in which people exert influence on what is happening, mostly as expected but not always. If you use a little imagination, it will not take you too long to realize that throughout any organization, it is necessary for people to join together to get things done. They do this in twos and threes, but also in groups and teams and these dependencies are essential. Over time, patterns of working are formed and re-formed, stories are shared on what to do and norms and

values are set to guide behaviour — for good or ill. Further, this process provides the foundation and materials for what have been called communities of practice as originally explained by Lave and Wenger (1991).

Considering the patterns in terms of leadership, where influence is working between people, because this process works locally on the basis of what works, what is right and what is valued, leadership at this level may or may not align with what others may determine as the organization's purpose, direction and values. In addition, because there is likely to be a large collection of different communities, each with valued ways of behaving and working, it becomes very difficult for those appointed as leaders to achieve declared outcomes. Instead, they are likely to face what might be better understood as an organization fog, shown in Figure 1.
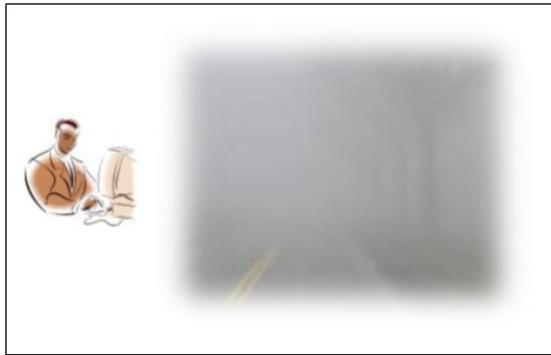
Figure 1: Organization as Fog

Even if you only partly accept the accuracy of this image, it does provide some understanding of the difficulties appointed leaders face when they seek to change culture. However hard leaders work to find clarity, through reports, figures and even face-to-face contact, most of the time they can only gain a partial view of what is happening. The fog will soon reform.

How leaders can work their way into the fog and tackle the difficult task of shifting culture will now be considered. However, it must be stressed that the arguments pursued here are premised on the basis of embracing the idea of leadership within everyday working with multiple communities of practice. A form of action learning provides the vehicle to do this

Action Learning for Problems and Appreciation

Most people involved in the field of practice called action learning would regard the work of Reg Revans (1983) as foundational, setting the standard for others. While there have been many variations on the basic ideas of Revans, after all he began his work in the 1950s, the classical approach to action learning involves problems that cannot be easily solved. Revans distinguished between puzzles which had an answer and intractable problems which have no clear answers and possibly none at all. For the latter, the best that can be done is to work with a group of peers or 'comrades in adversity' as Revans called them, and through a process of questions to challenge and support the person with a problem, an action can be found to try out, see what happens and, most importantly, learn from this process.

Problems and learning have been central to action learning for many years and many people have benefitted from this. However, all problems if they are real, are related to and connected to a context consisting of a wide range of factors that will affect what action is taken. But not all factors can be identified quickly and taken into consideration. This affects how those in an action learning process can structure problems. For leaders, how problems are understood becomes crucial to their actions as leaders, according to Keith Grint (2005) but when problems are unstructured, they are more difficult to state; this is mainly because of difficulties in understanding the current situation, or setting out what is a better situation or how to find the way to move from one situation to another. Because people generally try to avoid lack of clarity or have a low tolerance for ambiguity (or fog), there is a tendency to define problems, means and solutions based on prejudices and past experiences. Thus, the problem of culture shift might fall into the category as a clear move from one situation to another, as though everyone agreed with a solution. For example, if senior leaders declare that they want a culture that gives greater attention to and the valuing of customers, they might set this out as a path or roadmap to achieve this. However, such images, however clear, are likely to avoid the difficulties that might prevent progress, such as the priorities for action within different departments, the values and norms that are held by staff, the stories told about customers and others within everyday practice and so on.

What should now be clear is the difficulty of identifying all the relevant factors that need to be considered by leaders in seeking to change or shift culture. In terms of a problem that might be considered in action learning, culture change is very unstructured, making any move difficult and any effort made is likely to encounter a range of differing meanings and definitions of what is going on. One important manifestation may arise if culture change is expressed in terms of a problem. Leaders and those they involve may soon find that their interests are stymied by the response or lack of response form others, who might be termed as resistors, traditionalists or other negative categorizations. The danger is with what is normally considered as problem/ solution reasoning which avoids possible dilemmas and consideration of others who have valued views of the situation. As 'resistance' is met and continues to persist, leaders might seek to impose more controls and tackle what they believe is wrong and unhealthy in their organizations. As they do so, new cures are found and applied but as these also fail, the result is a culture of deficit and negativity that is counter to what is desired. There is a real possibility that problem/ solution approaches to change, despite positive intentions, might have little impact or worse, a negative effect, even if short-term evidence shows otherwise. Leaders who believe that their solutions correct in the face of other ideas are also avoiding the variety of different interpretations held by different communities, each with their own versions of what is right and good to do. The big question for leaders is how can they understand what is valued in the communities within organizations and which can provide an important impetus to shifting culture whilst also preserving what is best in the current culture?

One response is to move action learning away from problems and deficit towards what is valued and working. This makes use of key ideas drawn from a process called Appreciative Inquiry (AI), which works with conversations to find out what works well in an organization and how. Based on a process developed by Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987), it becomes possible through conversations to discover valuable knowledge which can be shared to stimulate learning but also lead to changes which are more acceptable because they come from the practices of what is already working and valued.

Central to AI is a conversation between at least two people where, in an effort to find out what is working and what is valued, a picture is developed which captures the meaning containing the strengths and virtues of what works. When a leader takes this positive orientation, they become both an inquirer through the gathering of data but also active in appreciating how people work. This can engender a positive momentum that elevates what is good and right.

AI can be understood and used quite flexibly, with no rules on times for stages. There is, however, guidance on the implementation of AI in the form of a cycle composed of four stages or phases. The cycle, shown as Figure 2, is a useful contrast to the traditional problem solving cycle. At the Discovery phase, the concern is to find out what is working well by having conversations with those who know what is working well. This highlights two key points about AI, which make it valuable in a culture shift process, especially if appointed leaders are participants. Firstly, through conversations, data is gathered by allowing others to tell stories of good practice. Stories are a well understood medium for the sharing of good ways of working in communities of practices and cover key events, characters involved, overall purpose and, crucially, what is valued (Weick 2012).
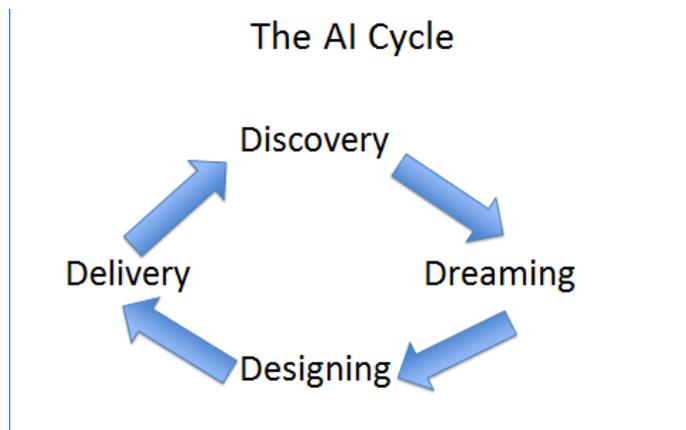
Figure 2: The AI Cycle
Source: Cooperrider and Whitney, 2000: 614

AI is a conversational activity in which at least two people join in. Leaders, if they wish to participate in such conversations must appreciate what is presented and respond accordingly. The stories must be treated as truthful and valued. This allows the second point to emerge: the stories can be collected and analysed for patterns and themes but based on real examples of practice. These can then be used to work out new possibilities for action and change in the Dreaming and Design phases. Whatever actions are considered need to be grounded in what is working and this makes whatever is agreed more feasible because it is not imposed from the outside; the actions and change are based on what is already happening inside the organization. However, whatever is designed must be delivered and this involves action by others. Again, conversations play a crucial part in this and as actions are taken, further understanding is gained and new phases of the AI cycle can begin. What is very important is that if leaders are part of this process, and they remain appreciative, they will learn about life in their organizations but will also be seen as promoters of positive actions because they have listened and appreciated. What now follows are examples from two organizations.

Culture Shift by Positive Action Learning (PAL)

To consider how action learning can work with AI this article draws on work completed with two organizations where leaders were seeking a culture shift. The first is a UK-based but US-owned design and production company which will be referred to as Company X. The second is a large public sector organization which will be referred to as PublicBody. Both organizations are located in the North of England and are considered important to local employment. Company X employs 2200 staff and PublicBody employs 8500.

For Company X, the leaders came to realize in 2012 that following some dramatic loss of sales and key contracts, there was a need to re-align strategy to build relationships more directly with consumers by increasing brand awareness. This was a striking difference to the previous 30 years where brand awareness rested principally with retailers such as large supermarkets and smaller independent shops who sold Company X's products to consumers, who usually did not know the source of the product. It was soon recognized that the re-direction of the organization would also require a shift in culture, even as staff were being made redundant. The project initiated sought to build a culture of engagement to enable change agility.

The project's objectives were set to:

1. Share best practice across the organization through building effective networks.

2. Re-energize communication processes.

3. Reinforce a culture of leadership at all levels to create a non-hierarchical "power base".

For PublicBody, the challenges faced were the same as many others operating in the public sector in the UK, relying mostly on central funding. There were statutory targets but as funding cuts began to take effect, there were shrinking resources with which to achieve the targets. A recent survey of staff opinions and attitudes had revealed a lowering of morale and engagement. This was, however, consistent with what had been happening in other public sector organizations in the UK. PublicBody's declared purpose stated:

- Put our communities first, responding to your needs and concerns.

- Treat you with care, compassion, humility and respect.

- Work with our communities and partners to solve local problems.

- Do what we say we will and keep you informed.

In both organizations, based on the recognition of the need for culture shift, an approach was developed that combined action learning with appreciative inquiry (AI). Since the plan involved using what was working in each organization as a way for leaders to discover and articulate what was a desired and feasible culture move, leading to action based on good practice, this approach was called Positive Action Learning or PAL. This felt particularly right for such a process and related comfortably with Revans' notion of action learning participants as 'comrades'. In each organization the process began with with PAL groups of leaders. There were five in the group in Company X and seven in PublicBody. At the first meeting of each group, both action learning and AI were introduced. However, in order to provide a baseline for improvement for each group, problem identification was taken as a way of setting the current state of the culture.

The question was posed: What were the key cultural problems and challenges?

A simple process was used based on a method called the nominal group technique where each person in each group could identify their view of the problems in response to the question posed. These could then be gathered and displayed through a round-robin process, allowing avoidance of duplication. Based on what was now in view, the participants could then specify the key dimensions for improvement. In each case, a set of dimensions were established which could be scored on the basis of 0 = starting baseline, 10 = fulfilment of improvement.

In Company X, the dimensions agreed are given in Table 1.

Company X Agreed Dimensions
• We have a 1 year strategy focused on delivery: we don't see a year 2 and 3 plan.
• There is a lack of ongoing communication: update/ where are we winning.
• Politics influences the strategy delivery and we aren't waking the talk.
• Lack of clear visibility of the leadership team (walking the talk, being aligned, listening and being seen together).
• Lack of a clear detailed vision/plan for year 1/2/3 with outcomes, actions and timings.
• Lack of engagement of all to really believe in the future.
• We don't have a common understanding of what the true issues are.
• There is no honest and open regular update on business performance with sufficient detail for people to take action.
• We aren't energizing people around what they can/ need to do.

Table 1: Company X Agreed Dimensions

In PublicBody, the Leaders were responding to a culture audit of the organization which had sought to assess current and future cultures against purpose, vision and values using a web based survey. The survey had been completed by 2390 staff. In addition, there had been four focus groups with 36 staff from across all grades.

Using their understanding from the audit report, the following dimensions were set. The leaders were able to specify not just the baseline positions at 0, but also a more desirable position at 10. Using their understanding from the audit report eight dimensions were established (Table 2).

	0	**v**	**10**
Engagement	Top down, not engaged		Full and two-way engagement
Trust	Low, lack of explanation Not knowing why		High, belief, knowing why
Confidence	Low challenge, blame culture		High challenge, low blame
Review and feedback	Top down, own agenda, narrow promotion criteria		Multi-sourced, developmental
Leadership	Disconnected, words not enacted. Poor role modelling		Reconnected, good role modelling. Doing and saying synchronized
Decision-making	Pushed upward, low discretion		High discretion
Silo-working	Low integration, competing districts		High integration. Collaboration
Change	Mixed messages, top down		Clarity, joint meaning

Table 2: PublicBody, Baseline Positions and More Desirable Positions.

Setting baselines was an important process for both groups since it allowed a vision of what progress might mean. The intention was not to set up another survey process since both organizations had endured several surveys and a degree of cynicism among the leaders and the staff was starting to emerge. Too often in the past, surveys had not resulted in sustainable actions and change. Leaders had assumed too readily that top-down change would feed through to everyone else. However, such changes were usually lost 'in the fog'. However in the context of an action learning process combined with AI, the indicators could provide a focus for the projects and, as others were engaged within each organization, some sense that shift might be occurring.

Once these indicators were established, the research moved away from the problems and deficiencies of the present. It was easily recognized that all the dimensions had long historical roots and how various attempts to address some of these had been partial and mostly failing. AI was introduced and this involved a simple process to work with conversations that appreciated what was working in their organizations. As a first step, the leaders could identify examples from their own experience of what was called 'really good work practice' or rgwp. They were asked to write responses to the following:

1. Identify an example known to you of a really good work practice (rgwp).
2. What happened that made it rgwp? – write a sentence.
3. How did the rgwp happen and why? – write a paragraph.
4. What are the implications of this rgwp for others? – bullet point.

The leaders were made aware of the process by allowing them to work in pairs to practice the appreciative interview, using the same questions to guide them. Leaders began to understand how AI worked and the value of conversations. There was a quick response to indicate empowerment and interest, and how change could be enabled. This allowed the task of finding others in each organization to interview to be set. This was called unfamiliar appreciation in unfamiliar settings since there was a preference to find others who they did not normally talk to.

Company X

In Company X, the group held interviews throughout the organization, keeping a record of what was working and how learning from each process could be applied. At the first review meeting, findings were shared and a list of the key words was compiled, shown in Table 3.

Key Words		
• Dynamic	• Engagement	• Collaborative
• Resilience to change	• Environment/ culture: attractive	• Visibility
• Talent retention	• Simple and less complex	• Ownership
• Charismatic leadership team	• Work life balance	• Protected from reality vs change agile
• Alignment: all working to the same goal	• Cross functional working	• Flexibility
• Clear communication: team days	• Pride in achievements	• Knowledge sharing

• Celebrate success: recognition	• Enthusiasm	• Embracing learning from mistakes
• Showing commitment: saying it and doing it	• Influence to business	• Empowered to make things better as part of your job
• Credibility	• Perceived value	• Honesty: no hidden agendas
	• Proactive	
	• Empathy	
	• Positive influencers	
	• Mutual respect: boss to team; team peers	

Table 3: Key Words from the Appreciative Interviews (Company X)

The ideas for how learning could be applied in other parts of the business included:

1. Share knowledge.
2. Swap logistics people into manufacturing.
3. Build a culture of networking: e.g. cross functional workshops: share specialist skill sets.
4. Practice empowerment: allow different decisions to be made and adopt a true coaching culture.
5. Learn from other businesses / areas.
6. Consistency in communication messages.
   - How are we performing and what can I do?
   - Acting on decisions quickly.
7. Celebrate success and recognize people: little treats and thank yous / individuals and teams.
8. Honesty: tell it how it is and enable individuals to rise to the challenges.
9. Simplify: give it a go. Break the process to ensure lean / speed. Be less of a perfectionist culture.
10. Alignment and detail: clear accountability from the exec down.

The above was based on each person conducting three interviews but in doing this, the Leaders experienced a process of engagement with staff. They discovered a number of 'first times':

- Those interviewed often felt that no one had taken any interest in what they were doing and what was valued.
- Gaining 'confidence' and feeling 'empowered' were consistent findings.

At end of the first review, the leaders considered the AI cycle and how they moved from discovery to dreaming and then design. A question was posed:

How do we start to build a network of positive influencers within Company X using the AI approach?

The dreaming became a design through the articulation of a project plan involving the spreading of the PAL process to others with each Leader facilitating a PAL group. This would create a network of PAL groups. The idea was to replicate the experience of the Leader group, now called the Champion Group. This would mean more people in the organization who were paying

attention to what was working and more people feeling appreciated for telling their stories. The data collected would also reveal what was being valued within communities of practice which the Leaders now had some access to. One of the most common stories was the presence of 'Inspirational leadership at all levels'.

The Leaders found 20 others who were invited to learning about PAL, using the same process as their own. It was made clear that joining the project was voluntary but all 20 were happy to participate and formed into five PAL groups, each facilitated by a Leader. Three weeks later a review was held and stories were reported. In addition, the Leaders were also building appreciation into practice. One story related to a meeting where, without prompting, a Leader had been able to focus on positive practice and what was working, which created a good atmosphere among those present. At a meeting of the senior management team, the CEO reported his interest in the importance of positive stories and that they "do not see enough of the good often enough".

Progress could also be assessed against the baseline dimensions. The sample is far from representative (24), but indicated a sense of confidence among the PAL groups, as shown in Table 4.

We have a 1 year strategy focused on AOP delivery: we don't see a year 2 and 3 plan.	5.8
There is a lack of ongoing communication: update/ where are we winning.	5.6
Politics influences the strategy delivery and we aren't waking the talk.	5.4
Lack of clear visibility of the leadership team (walking the talk, being aligned, listening and being seen together).	4
Lack of a clear detailed vision/plan for year 1/2/3 with outcomes , actions and timings.	4
Lack of engagement of all to really believe in the future.	5.6
We don't have a common understanding of what the true issues are.	5
There is no honest and open regular update on business performance with sufficient detail for people to take action.	5.4
We aren't energizing people around what they can/ need to do.	4.6

Table 4: Movement Against the Baseline (Company X)

By the time of the third review with the champion group, a process for recording interview results was in place and all groups were now engaged with several examples of what was working. Participants were feeling the sense of empowerment as they held interviews and were also learning the importance holding such conversations 'outside the silos'. Importantly, there was a feeling that 'the ship was steadying, with light at the end of the tunnel', although a continuing tension between cynicism and credibility remained.

PublicBody

In PublicBody, the seven Leaders went through the same process to learn the key features of AI and the skills of appreciative interviewing. A process of recording data for at least three interviews per person was agreed. It was also agreed to focus on the first items of concern that was revealed by the culture audit – engagement and trust. In particular, using the positive parts

of the dimensions, the Leaders sought work practices where these were enacted.

At the first review, each Leader was able to share findings. Once again, there was a sense that positive conversations had provided energy and satisfaction to others in the organization. There were many examples of good practice relating to engagement and trust. The data was collected with a focus on the actions and behaviour that were contained in the interviews. These were then used to form six themes as shown in Table 5.

Communication	Consult and Listen	Attitude
• Dispel myths. • Provide clarity. • Avoid rumours. • Show awareness of issues.	• Facilitate meetings. • Ask why. • Consider multiple voices and perspectives. • Show empathy. • Show engagement meaningfully.	• Equal partner working. • Non-hierarchic working. • Gain willingness of all partners. • Show humility.
Review and Challenge	**Reward and Recognition**	**Ideas and Innovation**
• Show honesty. • Create opportunities. • Support confidence to challenge. • Reduce barriers.	• Everyday and ongoing. • Transparent. • Consistency.	• Take responsibility. • Reduce blame. • Show support and trust.

Table 5: Themes for Engagement and Trust (Public Body)

The process was repeated for the issue of confidence and decision-making, resulting in further elucidation of themes based on actions and behaviours. It was soon recognized that the theme of communication was central to culture shift. In particular, there was a recognition of the failure of leaders and others in PublicBody to understand the complexity and sophistication of communication. This tended to mean an over-reliance on e-mail and top-down messages. Using the findings from AI, the Leaders agreed to the development of a Communications Workshop to be undertaken by Division Leadership Teams in the six divisions of the organizations.

After three cycles, the Leaders were ready to form PAL groups in each division with at least four other members for each group. This would allow Division Leaders' Teams to learn about good practices in the localized cultures of their division. For example, using the issue of leadership as a starting point, the findings in one division revealed the key actions and behaviours, shown as Table 6.

Responsiveness	Recognition of Value	Trust
• Shows awareness of needs. • Realizing the requirement. • Acting. • Reviewing the impact.	• Decide suitability for task. • Appreciate skills. • Deploy. • Review knowledge gained. • Energize others.	• Show confidence in ability. • Delegate authority. • Review results. • Recognize achievement. • Give credit.

Managing Ambiguity	Gaining Commitment for Unity	The Front Officer as Leader
• Identification of problem.		• Grant authority.
• Open to differences in perception.	• Show sensitivity to concerns.	• Trust to act.
• Create space for differences.	• Perspective taking.	• Data gathering and interpretation.
• 'Iron out' differences.	• Explaining reasons.	• See the patterns.
• Clarify agreed positions.	• Recognition of sacrifices.	• See the bigger picture and the detail.
• Articulate shared understanding.	• Staying in touch.	• Access resources.
		• Find, organize and coordinate interested parties.
		• Measure results, impact and follow up.

Table 6: Themes for Leadership in One Division (Public Body)

In addition to showing key themes for leaders, the findings also revealed, perhaps for the first time, the importance of leaders at a local level, who had to work interdependently with service users and other agencies. Similar patterns were shown in the findings from other divisions, each providing important indicators for good practice and in so doing 'feeding' the culture shift. The words had to become deeds.

The ongoing monitoring of progress against the baseline indicators was starting to show some movement (Table 7), although the sample size (31) was not yet representative.

1. Engagement	4.3
2. Trust	4.0
3. Confidence	3.5
4. Review and Feedback	3.8
5. Leadership	4.4
6. Decision-Making	3.8
7. Silo-Working	3.6
8. Change	4.1

Table 7: Movement Against the Baseline (PublicBody)

The evidence of shift is still emerging in PublicBody, but what is heartening, even at a time of continuing budget cuts, is that some of the leaders were seeing life in the fog, and appreciating the good work being completed, from which key lessons were being developed for the whole organization. As well as the roll out to Division Leaders, there were now plans for an extension of PAL more broadly to managers and a use of the knowledge gained to provide stories of good practice which could be introduced at appropriate moments. Culture shift could be enacted in the very processes of organizing.

Summary

As argued at the start of this article, culture change is fraught with difficulty, not least as a result of the failure of those who are appointed as leaders to become disconnected from the everyday working of life in communities of practice. Further, there is a tendency for leaders to seek to set

out for others, in the fog, a portrayal of what is desirable but not enacted. Leaders have to start from the position of not knowing their organizations but wanting to find out. Instead of construing their ignorance and the failure of change and culture shift as a problem, they can instead work from the assumption that for most of time, most of the workforce in any organization is seeking to do things that are right, good and valued. It is the task of leaders to appreciate the value attached by communities to what they do. This article has shown how in two organizations, leaders have tried, and are continuing to try, to do this.

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Apprenticeship Management at National and Company Levels: Research Based 'Good Practice' Principles

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HRD professionals are often involved closely with apprenticeship systems. Apprenticeships operate within companies but are almost always linked to a national apprenticeship system which provides legislation and regulation around aspects of apprenticeship. Most countries around the world have a formal apprenticeship system, although systems vary widely in their nature, their relative size and their sophistication.

The paper aims to provide a contribution to both policy and practice. It draws together and analyses three pieces of research undertaken between 2007 and 2013 by the author: one international comparative study on national apprenticeship systems, and two Australian projects on the ways in which companies manage their apprentices. The paper shows how the findings about good practice in apprenticeship management can be used at both national and company levels. The international study was funded by the International Labour Organization and the World Bank, and the Australian studies were funded by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research.

Introduction

Apprenticeships have been undergoing a revival for the past decade (Rauner and Smith, 2010) accelerated by the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 and its effects on youth unemployment. Countries have been revising their apprenticeship systems (e.g. in Ireland [Doran, 2015]), often looking to international comparisons in order to adopt practices that have worked elsewhere. As apprenticeships are, in almost all countries, employment-based, the system depends on employers being willing and able to offer jobs to would-be apprentices. A large proportion of companies in many countries therefore have an involvement with the apprenticeship system, ranging from employing one or two apprentices at any one time, to managing systems for hundreds of apprentices at multiple sites in the home country and sometimes overseas.

In order to gain maximum value from this common model for training and employment, it is helpful for both policy-makers and employers to examine good practice across the world. The international comparative research reported here involved eleven countries and a team of international researchers. The enterprise-level research studies were confined to Australia and focused on larger companies that had apprenticeship management systems in place. They were undertaken as part of national projects related to quality in apprenticeships and traineeships. For both national and company-level apprenticeship systems, principles of good practice, derived from the data, were proposed, and this paper draws together and further analyses these principles.

Because of the nature of the topic — systems which involve national governments, millions of companies world-wide, and many millions of apprentices — it is difficult for research to capture either the diversity or the complexity of apprenticeship systems, or to extract good practice principles that can be applied by companies. This paper makes a contribution by providing

analyses drawn from both system-level and company-level research. In the projects reported here, country case studies and company case studies alike were produced in a structured way, allowing comparisons to be drawn in a systematic manner. Moreover, the initial reports of all three projects were peer-reviewed, helping to ensure that the data are trustworthy.

Context and Background

The term 'apprenticeship' can be interpreted in many different ways, but a formal apprenticeship system is generally understood to have the following characteristics (Smith, 2010):

- A training regime set up by, or with the approval of, governments.

- A combination of off and on the job training.

- The assumption of responsibility by the employer for the development of the apprentice.

- The award of a qualification and/or licence and/or some other recognition that enables an occupation to be practised independently once the apprenticeship is successfully completed.

The German 'dual' system is commonly regarded as the 'gold standard' for apprenticeship (Pilz and Li, 2014). However, as has been pointed out (e.g. Deissinger, 2004) the system faces some challenges and has been in need of modernization. 'Dual' refers to the inclusion of 'school' or institution-based learning as well as company learning; in Germany, apprenticeships are normally undertaken by teenagers in a particular stream of the secondary school system, as opposed to the U.K. and Australia, for example, where apprentices have normally left secondary schooling. However, in both of the two latter countries, apprenticeships can now be commenced while at school (e.g. Clarke, Klatt, Dulfer and Cruikshank, 2015) and in some instances in the U.K. may include higher education qualifications (Bentwood and Baker, 2013). The German model is also utilized in Austria and Switzerland, although there are some differences among the systems, as Deissinger and Gonon (2015) point out in a comparison between Germany and Switzerland. In some countries, such as India, there is no compulsory off-the-job training, and in other countries, there are large informal apprenticeship systems.

Smith (2010) notes that apprenticeships are often expected to fulfil multiple functions, including (but not limited to) the following: a passage to adulthood for young people, a means of industry and national skill formation, and a means of developing occupational identity in a trade. While apprenticeships perform many useful functions, there is also a darker side; they are used as a means of restricting entry to occupations and in the past, access to apprenticeships has been denied to certain groups in some countries. For example Wedekind (2013) notes that black people were not allowed to undertake apprenticeships under apartheid in South Africa. It has also been pointed out by many commentators (e.g. Cockburn, 1981) that there are gender issues too; in some countries apprenticeships have traditionally been confined to a small number of 'trades' and by the nature of those occupations involved, have been available mainly to men.

Quality in apprenticeship is a perennial concern. Lucas and Spencer (2014) remind us that quality in apprenticeship should primarily relate to the nature and extent of learning, both on and off the job, but this can be forgotten in policy debates, which focus on system-level issues. The latter are certainly important, often involving issues around funding, reporting and accountability.

Concerns seem to be particularly evident when apprenticeship systems are being expanded rapidly, a reasonable concern because new employers and/or new training providers without experience become involved (Smith and Brennan Kemmis, 2013). Quality concerns that relate to traineeships (a newer form of apprenticeship) in Australia (e.g. Schofield, 2000) are mirrored in criticisms of the expansion of the apprenticeship system in UK, from the introduction of Modern Apprenticeships (e.g. Fuller and Unwin, 2003) to the more recent expansion of the U.K. system announced in 2015, to involve many more occupations and a range of qualification levels. Fuller and Unwin (2013) argue that apprenticeships should be closely linked to occupations and that they are deficient where this is not the case. More generally, in the U.K., apprenticeships outside traditional trades are often believed to be of lower quality than those of the pre-expansion period, and there is frequent reference to 'diluting the brand', as Lucas and Spencer (2014) point out.

As it becomes increasingly commonplace for companies to become global in their operations, the interactions of companies with local apprenticeship systems becomes a complicated matter. Pilz and Li (2014) find two different models for multi-national companies: one where companies adopt local apprenticeship systems ('divergence') and the other where companies implement the German system as far as possible throughout all countries of operation ('convergence'), but note that there has been little research into the topic. Pilz and Li (2014) also remind us that the German apprenticeship system is 'exported' to other countries in a more general manner, as many countries in Africa and Asia utilize the advice of German (or Swiss or Austrian) apprenticeship experts in setting up their own apprenticeship systems (Smith, 2014). The German model has even been trialled in the United States (Wyman and Gedge, 2015).

In the paper, the international project is discussed first, followed by the two Australian projects that investigated apprenticeship at company level. In each section, the method for that section is followed by the findings. The Australian section also contains additional literature specifically relating to the Australian system.

International Comparison

Research method

Project 1: 'Towards a model apprenticeship framework: a comparative analysis of national apprenticeship systems' (Smith, Brennan Kemmis et al., 2013) was carried out in 2012 and was undertaken to provide data on good practice in apprenticeship systems internationally, to assist with the redesign and expansion of the Indian apprenticeship system. Eleven highly-structured country case studies, some in developed countries (e.g. Canada, Germany) and others in less-developed countries (e.g. Indonesia, Turkey), were included in the international comparative phase. The choice of countries was guided by the funding bodies. Each case study was required to be validated by two in-country experts: one a senior government official, and the other a senior academic in the area. A cross-case analysis was undertaken to draw out the key features of these case studies as a preliminary step to identifying recommendations and principles for a model apprenticeship system that might inform the further development of India's apprenticeship system.

The cross-case analysis was informed by a number of international documents (INAP Commission, 2012; Smith, 2010; and European Commission, 2012). As part of the analysis, examples of good practice were derived. Case study authors provided responses to a section on issues, strengths,

weaknesses and learning from policy developments. A 'model apprenticeship framework' was then developed. This framework consisted, among other features, of a set of principles in specific domains. In this paper, the set of principles is the main focus of the international data.

The findings of Research Project 1 (Smith, Brennan Kemmis et al., 2013) relate primarily to structural matters associated with national apprenticeship systems. The cross-case analysis undertaken in the research project showed that there were a number of differences among apprenticeship systems internationally. For example, some apprenticeship systems were large, with over 1.5% of the workforce employed as apprentices (e.g. Australia, Germany) and some were very small for the country's size (e.g. India, Turkey, United States). Some countries, despite the small size of their systems, had a high policy focus on apprenticeships (e.g. South Africa, Turkey). Some countries (e.g. Germany, France) restricted apprenticeships predominantly to young people and/or to certain occupations; others (e.g. England, Australia, Indonesia) routinely included adults as well as young people; others made apprenticeships available mainly to adults (e.g. Canada, United States). Some counties required apprentices to be paid a wage; others did not, paying a stipend or allowance only e.g. Egypt, Indonesia).

Despite these major differences, countries had similar policy thrusts for their apprenticeship systems. At the time of the study, they were all aiming at increasing participation by employers, and increasing participation by individuals, including targeting specific learner groups, for example, women, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities. Many were working on aligning apprenticeship systems with national and/or international qualifications frameworks. All were attempting to address youth unemployment with specifically youth-targeted initiatives under the umbrella of apprenticeships. Most were trying to increase the range of apprenticeable occupations, and to improve the status of apprenticeships. Most were grappling with the issue of harmonization of apprenticeship regulations across State or Provincial boundaries. There were also concerns to align the systems with the changing structure of economies, for example to ensure that apprenticeship systems covered growing industries, and that there were methods for adding new occupations to lists of apprenticeable occupations.

Following further analysis of the data, including those issues that the country experts had identified as strengths and weaknesses, a set of principles were proposed as those that should underpin a national apprenticeship system. It was recognized that not all principles could in practice be adopted in all countries. It was also cautioned that apprenticeship systems grew from historical and cultural roots and that one country's system could never be transported wholesale to another country; nonetheless, individual features could be adopted. Table 1 summarizes these principles.

Domain	Associated Good Practice Principles
1. System's coverage of occupations	• Apprenticeships available in all industries. • Apprenticeships available in a range of occupations, particularly those that are typically undertaken by women as well as men.
2. Participation by individuals as apprentices	• Apprenticeships open to people of either gender and all ages. • Apprenticeships available in rural and regional as well as urban areas. • Clear pathways for school-leavers; pathways for disadvantaged people and for people without necessary entry qualifications. • Availability of off-the-job programmes to facilitate entry to an apprenticeship. • Pathways into apprenticeship (and beyond) are clear and well-publicised in ways that reach all potential candidates.

3. Comprehensive national governance structures	• National policy emphasis is both on training aspects and on employment aspects of apprenticeship. • Good liaison between government agencies responsible for different aspects of the apprenticeship system. • Where responsibilities lie with states and provinces as well as national governments, relative responsibilities are well-defined and publicised. • Rigorous qualifications that are regularly updated. • Collection of appropriate data about apprenticeships. • Systems are not inherently biased towards particular geographical areas (e.g. urban versus rural).
4. Involvement of stakeholders	• All major stakeholder groups (employers, training providers, employer groups and employee associations/trade unions) are involved in the development and maintenance of apprenticeship regulation and structures. • A commitment to collaboration among the various stakeholders. • Regulated system for adding new occupations to the apprenticeship system according to specified criteria.
5. Strength of quality systems	**Quality systems for training providers** • Training providers are subject to quality regimes including audits. • Content of qualifications is viewable on the internet. • Requirements for qualifications/training for teachers in training providers. • Trade testing at the conclusion of the apprenticeship, managed externally to the enterprise and the training provider (e.g. national 'Red Seal' examination system in Canada and local examination boards in Germany). **Quality systems for employers** • A registration scheme for enterprises/employing organizations offering apprenticeships, with requisite criteria; proportionate criteria (i.e. less stringent) developed for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), especially micro-businesses. • Supervision ratios in companies, which are communicated and enforced as part of maintenance of registration. • Requirements for qualifications/training for in-company trainers. • On-the-job training subject to some form of overseeing. • Continuing upskilling programmes for company trainers and teachers. • Industry bodies communicate with employers about apprenticeships.
6. Simplification of apprenticeship systems	• Harmonization across State/Provincial jurisdictions to enhance mobility and improve understanding of systems. • Consistency of contract periods for completion of apprenticeships (or at least no more than two or three allowable choices of length, as in Turkey). • Clear delineation of responsibilities of the employer, the training provider and the apprentice. • Removal of parallel systems within one country where feasible; or if not, clear communication processes.

7. Incentives for participation	• Financial incentives for enterprises to participate, subject to monitoring of satisfactory performance including audits. • Additional incentives for employers to employ disabled or disadvantaged people as apprentices. • Public funding for training providers. • Discounted wages for apprentices (either a lower overall rate or non-payment while at off-the-job training). • Payment of social contributions for apprentices by the State. • Financial incentives to apprentices to complete their contracts and to employers who continue to employ their apprentices after completion.
8. Support for apprentices and for employers	**Support for apprentices** • Assistance in meeting entry requirements and/or learning support once employed. • Employed status within an enterprise. • A combination of on and off the job learning with around 20% of time at a training provider and attainment of a recognized qualification. • A training plan within the company. • Opportunities to experience different workplaces if in a limited environment and a chance to mix with apprentices from other enterprises. • A 'case manager' to oversee progress in off and on the job training (e.g. 'pedagogical referent tutor' in France). • Opportunity to switch employers for good reason. • An increase in pay over the period of an apprenticeship and a higher rate of pay on completion. • A chance to progress further to higher level employment or self-employment. **Support for employers** • Provision to enterprises of suggested workplace curriculum and advice on cohort management systems for enterprises. • Support for small and medium enterprises, through structured arrangements, by specified bodies. • Support for employers rather than punitive measures for non-compliance. • Easily-available information about the system for would-be apprentices and employers (e.g. available via the 'Ellis chart', a comparative chart of apprentice training programmes across Canada[1]). • Fall-back system for apprentices whose employer can no longer afford to employ them (e.g. Group Training Organisations in Australia, or interim 'out of trade' arrangements).

Table 1: Model apprenticeship framework for national
apprenticeship systems — domains and principles

The principles are all drawn from existing practices in the case study countries, and some national systems displayed many of them already. They are, of course, more easily achievable in countries with higher levels of resources allocated to the training system. Countries with well-developed apprenticeship systems, however, may find it more difficult to adapt because interests are so well entrenched. This challenge was noted, for example, in the German case study in this project.

Company Level Research Projects: Australia

Background on the Australian system

A brief overview of the Australian system follows. The formal apprenticeship system in Australia was established soon after the Second World War and was confined to a defined number of occupations, mainly undertaken by male manual workers. The system remained relatively static until the mid-1980s, when traineeships were introduced (Knight, 2012). Traineeships expanded apprentice-like arrangements into many occupational areas that had not previously supported contracted training, such as retail, tourism and hospitality. In 1997 the traditional apprenticeship and the traineeship systems were brought together under the umbrella of the 'New Apprenticeship', now called 'Australian Apprenticeship', system, although in common usage they are usually referred to separately. Traineeships tend to be shorter than traditional apprenticeships, typically one to two years, and are often in industry areas which have not previously had accredited training. There has been some controversy around the availability of government funding for this purpose (e.g. Schofield, 2000), although the funding is no greater, and often less, than that for traditional apprenticeships. In some industry areas, traineeship qualifications have been used for initial training for 'shop floor' type occupations with large numbers of workers, with companies reporting that the availability of such training is a good recruitment and motivational tool (Smith, Comyn, Brennan Kemmis and Smith, 2009). At the height of the Australian apprenticeship system, in 2011, there were almost 449,000 apprentices and trainees in training (National Centre for Vocational Education Research [NCVER], 2012). This constituted 3.7% of the working population of just over 12 million people, proportionately on a par with the German system. However, funding cuts for traineeships since 2012 have led to a rapid decline, so that the number of apprentices and trainees decreased by 10.3% in 2013 alone, from 346,600 to 311,000 students (NCVER, 2015). The decline was almost entirely in traineeships rather than traditional apprenticeships.

In Australia, some intermediary organizations, partly funded by government, are involved in apprenticeships and traineeships. These include Australian Apprenticeship Centres (since mid-2015, known as Apprenticeship Network Providers), which manage the contractual arrangements between employer and apprentices/trainee. In about 12% of apprenticeships and traineeships, Group Training Organisations (GTOs) are involved. These act as the actual employer of the apprentice/trainee, with the employer paying a fee to the GTO to cover wages and administrative arrangements (Bush and Smith, 2007)'. This removes some of the risk of employing an apprentice/trainee, as the latter can be 'returned' to the GTO if unsuitable or in the event of a business downturn. As with most other countries, a training provider (known as a Registered Training Organisation [RTO]) is responsible for the off-the-job training and the award of the related qualification. Finally, it needs to be explained that in Australia, apprenticeships and traineeships can in theory be delivered entirely 'on the job' meaning the students need not be required to attend a training provider (Smart, 2001). However, RTOs are required to visit students for specified number of hours annually, and maintain regular contact by phone and email, and are responsible for the assessment of learners.

Research method

The Australian section of the paper draws on data from two studies (Table 2).

Project No.	Project Title	Date of Research	Overall Method
2	Identifying the characteristics of high quality traineeships (Smith, Comyn, Brennan Kemmis, and Smith, 2009).	2007-8	Studies of six industry areas, each comprising six specified interviews at industry level and two company case studies (each involving 7 interviewees including 2 apprentices, managers and trainers); 13 high-level policy interviews.
3	Understanding the psychological contract in apprenticeships/traineeships to improve retention (Smith, Walker, and Brennan Kemmis, 2011).	2009-10	Surveys of apprentices/trainees and employers in two States; nine company case studies (67 case study participants); 12 high-level policy interviews.

Table 2: Australian research projects utilized in this paper

There are some limitations to the method in these studies. In Project 2, the selection of the six industry areas could have affected the outcomes of the study, although the areas were selected carefully in conjunction with the project reference group and spanned manufacturing through to service industries. Project 3's nine company case studies, as with Project 2, represented a range of industry areas and size of company; but were necessarily a small sample. However, the survey, carried out with a large population of apprentices/trainees and employers from two State databases, helped to provide a broader picture. In both projects the inclusion of high-level stakeholder interviews and, in the case of Project 2, industry-level interviewees too, helped to ensure a wider perspective as these interviewees were people with decades of experience in the field, guarding against drawing inappropriate conclusions from the data.

Findings about good practice

As explained earlier in this paper, there have been quality-related concerns about traineeships in Australia, following what was at the time perhaps a too-hasty expansion of the system (Smith and Keating, 2003). However Research Project 2 showed a number of high quality practices in Australian companies and training providers which belied the 'bad press' received by traineeships. These practices are described below and it was concluded that most could be applied to traditional apprenticeships as well.

For this paper we focus on the findings of the project about good practice in the four phases of the 'traineeship lifecycle' — recruitment, sign-up and induction; training delivery and assessment; support during the traineeship; and completion and beyond. The findings are drawn both from the industry case studies, each comprising company examples as well as industry-level interviews, and the high-level national stakeholder interviews. The industry areas that were studied were: financial services, children's services, asset management (cleaning), construction, retail and meat processing (abattoirs).

The characteristics of a high-quality traineeship that emerged from the data analysis are described below, phase by phase. In the report of Project 2 (Smith, Comyn, Brennan Kemmis and Smith, 2009), characteristics were classified by whether the characteristics were considered necessary, or were 'ideal'. For reasons of space, only the 'necessary' are listed below.

Phase 1 of traineeship: Recruitment, sign-up and induction

Prior to recruitment, the registered training organization and intermediaries learn about the organization's workplace and business issues and try to ensure that the traineeship adds value to the enterprise as well as to the individual. The registered training organization works with the employer and the supervisor to select the qualification and units of competency for the traineeship, ensuring they are relevant to the enterprise and the future career intentions of the trainee. The qualification provides the potential for advancement to a higher qualification or pathways to other education and training options and is designed to develop occupational loyalty within the trainee.

Once the trainee has been selected, the registered training organization and intermediaries meet with the employer, supervisor and trainee to establish a partnership and provide advice to the enterprise and the trainee. The employer and immediate supervisor demonstrate a strong commitment to the success of the traineeship; the employer clearly regards the traineeship as an investment in their workforce and as a way to attract and retain staff. The employer considers traineeships to be part of the organization's overall workforce development strategy and is clear about the purpose of traineeships. The trainer, trainee and supervisor are in no doubt about the expected outcomes and processes to be delivered through the traineeship and each party's relevant responsibilities. All parties are aware of the frequency of contacts from the registered training organization, the means of communication available (SMS, email, phone) and the dispute-resolution processes in place. The employer conducts an induction/orientation session for the new trainee or trainees.

In larger organizations, the human resource team develops comprehensive guidelines for the business units which take on trainees. This team ensures consistent treatment of trainees and safeguards the organization's training standards. Where possible, a person is given responsibility for managing all trainees in the organization.

Phase 2 of traineeship: Training delivery and assessment

The registered training organization and employer agree on a programme that includes the mixture of on- and off-the-job training that will ensure the highest quality outcomes in the traineeship. The training organization does not impose a single delivery model on the employer but offers a tailored delivery and assessment solution suited to each workplace. The training organization works with the employer to ensure that any in-house employer training is embedded in the traineeship and to provide opportunities for integrating the trainee's learning and assessment with workplace practices.

The employer ensures that time is set aside for training — on the job, in the workplace or off site. The employer makes sure that the trainee is given opportunities for practice, accepts the likelihood of mistakes and provides skilled and empathetic trainers and supervisors to encourage quality learning experiences. The employer ensures that all worksites operate according to good working practices and conditions, particularly in relation to OH&S, and that good practice is modelled in the workplace to provide a consistent message for the trainee. The employer ensures that the trainee is closely supported by mentors or buddies and that supervisors spend time with trainees to mentor and encourage their learning.

Both the registered training organization and the employer utilize trainers with skills, knowledge and experience of a high standard. They aim for high-quality training that will extend the trainee's skills and encourage their attachment to the occupation, rather than focusing only on completion. Trainers are enthusiastic about the field of study and keep up with rapidly evolving technology and work practices. The training organization uses high-quality and current learning materials with a strong emphasis on OH&S and relevant to the trainee's workplace. Both the training organization and employer ensure that training and assessment materials are customised to the specific workplace activities rather than being generic workbooks. Materials are adapted to suit trainees with particular

language, literacy or numeracy needs. Assessment is as holistic as is compatible with rigour and relevant to the workplace, while avoiding over-customization. Underpinning knowledge extending beyond the immediate workplace is delivered.

Phase 3 of traineeship: Support during the traineeship

Intermediaries develop good ongoing relations with employers and build trust with managers, supervisors and trainees. They provide accurate, current, and appropriate information. Registered training organization staff undertake frequent visits to ensure on-the-job trainees are satisfied with their learning and their daily work. During visits, training organization staff reinforce the relationships between theory and practice and deal with any employment, motivational or relationship issues, or alert appropriate intermediary staff. For traineeships involving off-the-job training, training organization staff contact employers regularly to discuss the trainee's progress and ensure that off-the-job training takes account of the type of workplace in which the trainee is located.

Employers and supervisors provide regular and ongoing feedback to trainees. The employer provides a dedicated mentor for the trainee. The mentor meets with the trainee regularly to check and ensure progress through the learning materials and the employer evaluates the mentoring relationship. The training organization, supervisor and trainee participate in an ongoing review process to monitor issues and progress.

Phase 4 of traineeship: Completion and beyond

Both training organization and intermediary staff work with the employer, supervisor and trainee in an effective and timely manner to ensure effective completion of the traineeship. They make sure that all assessment tasks are completed and that the trainee feels confident in each area covered. The parties participate in a comprehensive evaluation of the traineeship and review findings collectively to ensure continuous improvement purposes. (Extracted from Smith, Comyn, Brennan Kemmis, and Smith, 2009: 32-34).

Research Project 3 (Smith, Walker, and Brennan Kemmis, 2011) encompassed apprenticeships and traineeships, and focused on the importance of the psychological contract in these contracts of training. The research started with the premise that the success of apprenticeships/ traineeships and the satisfaction of the parties (employers and apprentices/trainees) are affected to a considerable extent by the expectations of both parties, their beliefs about their obligations, and the extent to which expectations are met. The research framework for this project drew on psychological contract theory (e.g. Dabos and Rousseau, 2004). In the following discussion, the term 'apprentices' is taken to include 'trainees' as well.

The project found that expectations of apprenticeships were high on both sides of the employment relationship (i.e. the employer and the apprentice). The survey results showed that compared with previous studies on non-apprenticed occupations (e.g. Hutton and Cummins, 1997) expectations were high and also each party's expectations of their own obligations was higher. This indicates that there is a need for companies to pay particularly close attention to their management systems for apprentices, compared with other workers.

Case study and survey data alike indicated some good practices that could be adopted more widely to improve the satisfaction of both parties and higher quality outcomes. Employers who retained their apprentices and trainees had instituted sound human resource management procedures including providing extensive information to would-be applicants, instituting performance management systems for apprentices, and devizing early intervention strategies for

'at-risk' apprentices. They had clear lines of communication both within the organizations and externally with other parties to the apprenticeship. They provided rewards and recognition for good performance, and paid careful attention to both on and off the job training.

Companies did less well, in their own view, about providing 'specific time for training' and 'a range of training methods' (these were survey items that companies self-rated lower than other items); but knew that they needed to improve. Improvements in training practices required very close liaison with the relevant registered training organizations, and this sort of dialogue was evident in some of the case studies. The best employers among the case study companies showed active and continuous learning about the management of apprentices and trainees.

Two examples of company case studies are provided below[2]. Both companies were heavily involved in the national apprenticeship system, one employing traditional apprentices and one employing trainees. They provide examples of some of the practices mentioned above.

Case 1: Power Co

PowerCo (employing apprentices) was a government-owned electricity distribution corporation in Queensland covering regional and remote areas. PowerCo employed 4,500 people of which 340 were apprentices. At the time of the case study around 75 apprentices were recruited each year from an applicant pool of between 1,200 and 2,000 (including internal applicants). There was a 90% completion rate. Most of PowerCo's apprentices worked as distribution linesperson/ electrical powerline linesperson (about 70% were in this category), systems electricians/electrical fitter mechanics, and communications technicians and completed Certificate III level qualifications. PowerCo was a company with a long and proud tradition of training apprentices. The industry was heavily apprenticed; managers had come up through the ranks. These factors helped to ensure that those responsible generally had a strong commitment to ensuring the apprentices were trained well. The large size of the company assisted in some ways, as apprentices were rotated among departments and sites, but in others created difficulties; apprentices could be provided with a wide range of experiences but on the other hand could get 'lost' for a while with a poor supervisor. The company had compensated for the latter problem by setting up a system almost like a Group Training Organisation, appointing geographical area field officers with a caseload of around 50 people and with a quarterly reporting system involving the apprentice and his supervisor/workgroup leader. These practices were extremely resource-intensive but resulted in a high completion and retention rate. The other major features, also made possible by the resources available within the company were a highly selective recruitment procedure involving a number of different steps, and an industrial relations agreement that provided a level of pay for mature-aged apprentices that was likely to attract high-quality applicants.

Case 2: RestaurantCo

RestaurantCo (employing trainees) was a quick-service food company holding a State franchise for fried chicken. The traineeship programme, designed for customer service staff in the stores who completed a Retail Certificate II qualification, had commenced 11 years prior to the research, as a result of collaboration between the Human Resource Manager and an Australian Apprenticeship Centre. Over 1000 people had completed traineeships at RestaurantCo since the programme had commenced; this represented a completion rate of over 90%. The programme was a large-scale human resource strategy that embedded progressive gaining of qualifications within the store-level promotions processes. Originally, the programme was 100% on-the-job, but when that proved 'a disaster', a proportion of off-the-job raining was introduced. While the trainees who were

interviewed were satisfied with their traineeships, it was evident from reports of other stores and other trainees that problems could arise when store managers were not fully committed to the programme. Risk was lessened by two major factors: confining entry to the programme to existing workers recommended by store managers and building long-term relationships with the Australian Apprenticeship Centre and the RTO which both played a major part in the programme. The close involvement of the major players in the programme was advantageous to some extent, but could be a problem as the fulfilment of the trainees' expectations was distributed among those parties, over which the company had no direct control.

This final point in respect of Case 2 illustrates a major finding of the project which was that, to a much greater extent than in ordinary employment contracts, many parties were important in affecting the psychological contract between the individual apprentice and the employing company. Figure 1 illustrates these parties and shows how communication occurred between the external parties as well as between the company or apprentices and the external parties. The training provider (Registered Training Organisation) was integral to the success of the apprenticeship. It was found that the importance of the role of the Australian Apprenticeship Centre varied among companies, and Group Training Organisations were involved in only a proportion of apprenticeships. The other organizations and people which affected the psychological contract — shown in the background of the figure — were not researched directly but were mentioned by many interviewees. For employers, these other influences, both direct and indirect, meant that their apprentices' satisfaction was affected by many other factors over which they did not have control.
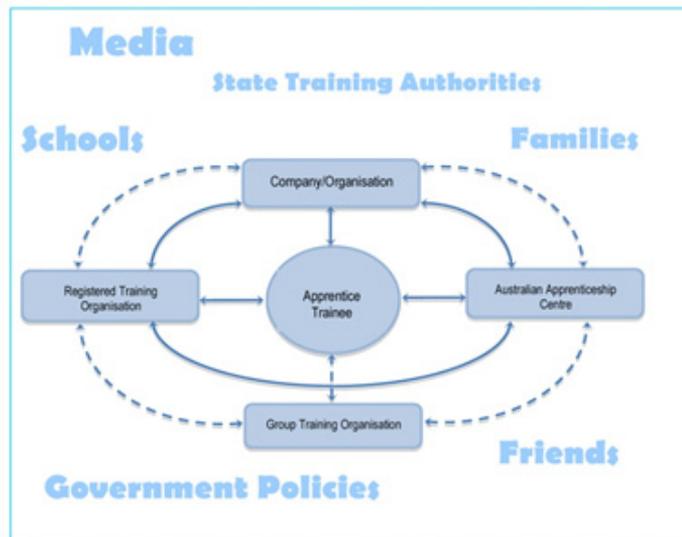

Fig. 1: The interdependent relationships among apprentices/trainees
and their employers, RTOs, Australian Apprenticeship Centres,
and Group Training Organisations

Meta-Analysis

The meta-analysis for this paper was designed to illustrate the method by which the good practice principles could be used in different countries and in individual companies, and proceeded as follows. Firstly the international principles for a model apprenticeship system (Project 1) were mapped, in a general way, against the Australian system, using a process earlier used for the Indian system (Smith and Brennan Kemmis, 2013) and also subsequently employed by Doran (2015) for the Irish system. Secondly the findings of the two Australian company-level projects (Projects 2 and 3) were mapped against those international principles that related specifically to company-level matters. And finally, the two company case studies were analysed in relation to the Australian findings.

Step 1

In this step, the Australian system, as the site for Projects 2 and 3, was mapped against the international principles for national systems (Table 1), using the domains as sub-headings. The Australian information is taken primarily (with some updating) from Smith (2010) which included a case study of Australia in an entry on apprenticeships in the International Encyclopedia of Education. In this discussion, the term 'apprenticeship' is taken to mean 'traineeship' as well.

System's coverage of occupations. In Australia apprenticeships are available in all industries and in a range of occupations, particularly those that are typically undertaken by women (generally traineeships) as well as men. However, funding structures at both Federal and State level favour masculinised occupations (Guthrie, Smith, Burt and Every, 2014).

Participation by individuals as apprentices. Apprenticeships are open to people of all genders and ages, and in rural as well as urban locations. There are clear pathways for school-levers and there are no entry-level qualifications, in most cases, except those that may be required by individual employers. Apprenticeship programmes are well-publicised in schools and on government web sites at both national and State level. There are off-the-job programmes to facilitate entry ('pre-apprenticeships', or more generic programmes) but these are not available in all occupations.

Comprehensive national governance structures. There is liaison among agencies responsible for different aspects of the system, as well as liaison between Federal and State agencies. The policy emphasis is on training as well as employment aspects. Qualifications are updated by the relevant Industry Skills Councils and are required to adhere to the Australian Qualifications Framework. State governments collect data from employers and training providers. There is no inherent bias towards particular geographical areas.

Involvement of stakeholders. Major stakeholder groups are routinely consulted in relation to apprenticeship regulations and structure. There is not always a commitment to collaboration among the parties. There is no clear system for adding new occupations to the apprenticeship system. Employers have the opportunity to be involved in development of qualifications through Industry Skills Councils.

Strength of quality systems. Training providers are subject to audit. However, there are well-known quality issues among private training providers which the regulatory body acknowledges are not readily addressed (Harris, 2015). The content of qualifications is readily available on the internet. There is no trade testing at the conclusion of apprenticeship; the system relies on the

training provider assessing to the qualification. There are no requirements for teaching/training qualifications for workplace supervisors of apprentices; and teachers in training providers are enquired only to have a Certificate IV level qualification which is acknowledged as being one of the least-well delivered in the system (Smith, Hodge and Yasukawa, 2015). Employers are not required to undergo any type of vetting to employ apprentices and are not monitored on their performance in training apprenticeships. There are no required supervision ratios (except in a few industrial relations agreements). In some industries, there is extensive communication from employer bodies about apprenticeships.

Simplification of apprenticeship systems. Elements of the system are managed at a State level, but there is increasing harmonisation across State boundaries and only one system. The respective responsibilities of the different parties to apprenticeships are reasonably well-defined, with employer responsibilities least clear. There is no consistency of contract periods, as a relatively new so-called 'Competency-Based Completion' system (which is different from the curriculum meaning of competency based training) allows apprentices to complete at any time, subject to being signed off by the employer and the training provider. The latter system is reportedly causing difficulties.

Incentives for participation. There are financial incentives for employers to take on apprentices, and funding for training, although both varies across occupations. Apprentices have employment contracts and a rate of pay that rises each year and on completion. The vast majority of apprentices are retained by their employing companies at the end of their apprenticeship. Apprentices are required to be issued with a training plan. Apprentices are allowed to switch employers, but arrange that themselves unless they are employed by a Group Training Organisation. Apprentices do not necessarily receive any off-the-job training, and may not be offered the chance to experience different workplaces. Employers may receive support through employer associations, but this varies among industries. Employers do not generally receive any advice on workplace curriculum.

This analysis shows that Australia performs reasonably well against some of the eight principles but less well against others. Employer-related issues are the weakest areas of the system. Employers need not be vetted to take on apprentices; their work with apprentices is not monitored; their staff need not be qualified; they need not have appropriate supervision ratios for apprentices; they are not advised on workplace curriculum; and they are not required to offer their apprentices off-the-job training. In addition, Australia fares badly in gender equity in the sense that the system favours masculinised occupations, while there is no direct discrimination against women. Quality of training is also a problem in the system.

Step 2

This step in the analysis maps company-level findings of the two Australian projects (Projects 2 and 3) against the model apprenticeship framework using the two company case studies summarised above. The discussion focuses on the employer-related weaknesses of the Australian system that were identified in Step 1. Both organizations were multi-site and had set up their own systems for trying to maintain quality, that were able to some extent to address some but not all of these deficiencies. Both companies offered off-the-job training. Also, in both companies, a suggested workplace curriculum was developed within the company. Both companies have provided oversight of on-the-job training, via the field officer in the case of PowerCo, and the

RTO in case of RestaurantCo. These people provided a variant of the 'case manager' system mentioned in Table 3. PowerCo instituted rules about supervision of apprentices and trainees, in the absence of national requirements. Only PowerCo provided the opportunity to experience different workplaces, although RestaurantCo did allow the chance to mix with trainees from other sites (but only other sites within the company). While there was no system for switching employers in either case, RestaurantCo allowed reversion to a non-trainee status for trainees who decided they did not want to continue with the programme. In both instances, progression to higher-level work on completion of the apprenticeship or traineeship was an integral part of the whole system.

The companies also addressed further shortcomings in the Australian system. They attempted to deal with well-known quality issues among training providers by choosing their providers carefully, and, in the case of RestaurantCo, maintain constant liaison with the RTO. However, neither company addressed the deficiencies in national requirements for teacher qualifications either in the RTO or the company itself. No reference was made by either company to any upskilling programmes for the in-company training staff. Finally, the multiplicity of players within, and also outside the company (in the case of RestaurantCo), which is a feature of apprenticeship systems worldwide, was a challenge in both companies. In both instances, the presence of multiple people with responsibilities for apprentices and trainees helped to ensure that issues did not go unnoticed. On the other hand managers pointed out that sometimes staff avoided responsibility by passing problems onto other departments or personnel, and also that the number of bodies meant that additional monitoring was required.

Step 3

In this final step of the analysis, the company case studies were mapped against relevant parts of the overall findings of Projects 2 and 3. This step shows how company's apprenticeship systems can be benchmarked against national good practice. For both companies, a comparison with Project 2's characteristics of high-quality traineeships showed clear alignment with the characteristics listed under Phase 1 (recruitment, sign-up and induction). Support during the traineeship (Phase 3) was well-represented in both company case studies, although in both cases it was noted, in different ways, that immediate supervisors did not always give sufficient feedback to the apprentices/trainees. Both companies were focused on completion (Phase 4) and on ensuring the apprentices/trainees were confident in their work. As the apprentices/trainees were expected to move onto senior roles in the companies, this was clearly of importance.

Project 3's overall findings provide a useful benchmarking for the company case studies. Both companies had comprehensive recruitment and performance management strategies in place, characteristics of good practices found in the project as a whole. PowerCo had early intervention strategies but RestaurantCo did not have any clear procedures for this. Lines of communication were not made entirely clear within the companies, with line managers and those responsible for managing the apprenticeship/traineeship systems both, perhaps inevitably, playing roles whose boundaries could shift according to particular cases. Close liaison with external bodies was a major feature at RestaurantCo but not so much at PowerCo which seemed to be more self-sufficient in its apprenticeship system; the role of the RTO and of the Australian Apprenticeship Centre was barely mentioned at PowerCo.

Conclusions

This paper has described agreed good practice in apprenticeship systems, a 'model apprenticeship framework, derived from a systematic analysis process across eleven countries. It has illustrated how these principles of good practices could be utilised for benchmarking purposes both at a national level and by companies that employ apprentices. In the case of the article the company-level analysis has been undertaken using previously-completed research projects undertaken by the author.

The three-step analysis process employed in the meta-analysis is not merely a scholarly exercise; it is readily translatable for practitioners. The model apprenticeship framework developed in Project 1 is by no means the only one available for countries' apprentice governance systems. A CEDEFOP-funded project (Hauschildt and Wittig, 2015) has recently developed a similar framework, albeit only in relation to governance and financing and only derived from European country case studies (n=5), unlike Project 1 in this paper which covers countries in other continents. The CEDEFOP-funded project provides an indication of potential practical application of the model apprenticeship framework. In that project, workshops were held in each country with major national stakeholders where the results for that country are fed back and discussed with a view to system improvement (Hauschildt and Wittig, 2015).

This paper also goes beyond the national policy level. It incorporates analysis of company systems, not only against national good practice, but also against international good practice principles. The analysis undertaken in the paper in Step 2 indicates that there are possibilities for companies to make internal provisions that can help to address deficiencies in national systems. In order to do this, HRD practitioners need to have a good awareness of international policy and practice in apprenticeships. This enables them to identify weaknesses in their countries' systems which they can address, in a similar manner to Step 1 in the meta-analysis. While this may be particularly important where companies operate across national borders, as it can be done for the multiple international settings, it is also helpful for companies with a purely national focus.

Notes

1 http://www.ellischart.ca
2 Full case study report for these and for the other seven case studies can be found at: http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2432.html in "Support Documents".

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Developing Talent Strategies: Research Based Practice in Oman

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Organizations struggle to move from the conceptualisation of talent strategies to practical implementation. This paper proposes the use of a talent management evolution matrix which enables the organization to assess and develop the link between the concept and practice of talent management. Gathering data from thirty-nine semi-structured interviews, the matrix is applied in order to understand the differences between the finance and energy sectors in Oman and how they perceive and practice talent management. The findings suggest that Omani talent management practices are shaped strongly by the institutional environment and the nature of business strategy, yet this has resulted in differences between how the finance and energy sectors conceptualize talent management. Despite these differences the findings show that talent management is practiced in similar ways within both the finance and energy sectors, suggesting convergence at the practice level only.

Strategy Driven Talent Management

The achievement of an organization's business goals will require leaders who do the right things, managers who do things right and an engaged workforce that has the skills and capabilities to perform business functions effectively. In short there will need to be alignment between the organization's people and its business strategies. Talent management: "the future proofing of an organization's human capital pool" (Tatoglu et al., 2016: 278), provides a means through which this alignment can be achieved. This paper proposes that a 'talent management evolution matrix' is one way in which an organization can identify its current position alongside a range of strategic options that will facilitate the development of a talent strategy. The paper makes a key contribution to an understanding of how talent management can be evaluated in practice and the matrix connects both the conceptual acceptance of talent management and its implementation. Using empirical evidence gathered through thirty-nine semi-structured interviews this paper examines how the talent management evolution matrix can be applied to organizations in the financial and energy sectors in Oman.

The alignment between business goals and the development of strategic capabilities will be determined by the nature of these goals, the timescales within which they are to be achieved; the geographic footprint over which they are spread and the level of innovation or transformation required. These factors will determine the numbers of people, the level of skills and capabilities and will shape organizational culture. Such a response will lead to people policies and practices that are informed by strategic workforce planning — a comprehensive approach to talent where strategic talent management will be complemented by operational talent activity (Collings et al., 2011). In this respect there is increasing pressure to deliver a talent strategy that is aligned qualitatively (knowledge, skills and behaviours) and quantitatively (return on investment in talent, return on investment in human capital) to business objectives.

However, talent management strategy is influenced by both internal and external considerations including the structure of the organization and the institutional context within which it resides. Organizational structures might include the creation of global matrices or networks that replace traditional hierarchies and these are shaped by demographic and behavioural changes of a workforce comprising multi-generational, mobile and information 'accessed' workers (Turner and Kalman, 2014). The nature and strength of these internal dynamics will depend upon the markets or sectors in which the organization chooses to compete. External considerations focus on the increasing need for talented people in both knowledge economies and the more traditional sectors. The World Economic Forum (2011) emphasized the need for 'highly educated people' to sustain economic growth and anticipated talent shortages by 2020 in 25 countries, 13 industries and 9 occupational clusters. The universality and diversity of these shortages are striking; ranging from significant shortages of those with supply chain skills at junior, middle and senior management level (Dubey and Gunasekaran, 2015); wide ranging shortages in the five economies of China, Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong and Taiwan (Tatli et al., 2013); skill shortages in science, technology, engineering and mathematics in the USA (Bayer, 2014) as well as shortages in marketing, construction and health professionals in economies around the world. The effect of labour market forces in both contexts is that the excess demand for leadership, managerial, project, specialist and operational talent highlights the attraction and subsequent retention of this talent.

Thus, internal organizational dynamics and how they combine with and respond to external labour market forces suggests that organizations find it difficult to match the demand for talent with the supply of talent. Even when organizations attempt to do so, they are faced with multiple challenges including the initial identification of talent, the means through which talent can be developed and how to manage this talent resource throughout the organization lifecycle. The alignment objective, clearly laid out in the introduction to this paper, becomes less clear once the objectives for talent management move from conceptualization to operationalization.

Key Constructs of Talent Strategy, Management and Organizational Alignment

There has been a good deal of research on several of the key constructs of talent strategy and management (Tarique and Schuler, 2010). Guidance on the principles of strategic talent management have been set out (Stahl et al., 2011); and how to mobilize the organization to achieve strategic alignment through talent management and human resource development (HRD) is articulated (Alagaraja, 2013). In addition, research outputs include work on the importance of executive and manager engagement in delivering talent strategy (Anderson, 2009; Bjorkmann et al., 2011); the effectiveness of the tools of talent management (Yarnall, 2011; Scott-Ladd et al., 2010) and some of the measures needed to assess its progress (Yapp, 2009). The differences between twentieth and twenty-first century talent strategy have been noted (Capelli, 2008) and advice exists on how to turn organizations into 'talent factories' (Ready and Conger, 2007) for talent management in a new era (Cheese, 2010). Strategy driven talent management (Silzer and Dowell, 2010) is high on both the HRD and corporate agenda, but the evidence of the effectiveness of strategic alignment is mixed (Gibb and Wallace, 2014), explained in part, by the key challenges that organizations face in operationalising a talent management strategy.

The first challenge — defining the meaning of talent and talent management — arises because of the inconsistent definitions of talent at the national, regional or global level leading to contradictions in advice and fragmentation in theory (Tarique and Schuler, 2010). On the

one hand, talent management can be defined as "the systematic attraction, identification, development, engagement/retention and deployment of those individuals with high potential who are of particular value to an organization" (Tansley et al., 2007: xi); or in a global context talent management may be considered as the "activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions which differentially contribute to the organization's sustainable competitive advantage, the development of a talent pool of high potential and high performing incumbents to fill these roles, and the development of a differentiated human resource architecture to facilitate filling these positions with competent incumbents and to ensure their continued commitment to the organization" (Collings and Mellahi, 2009: 304-313.) Such definitions depend upon the predominant philosophy of the end user and whether they adopt pools, practice, people or positions in their approach to talent management (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Scullion and Collings, 2010; Sparrow, Scullion, and Tarique, 2014). These approaches hinge on the idiosyncrasies of the operating environment and the opinions of key stakeholders and decision makers (Zhang and Bright, 2012). Such philosophies place the concept of talent on a continuum ranging from an approach which is exclusive, involving only a few people-normally the executive cadre, successors and high potentials, to one that is inclusive where everyone is talented. In a recent study of talent management in multinational companies, Iles et al., (2010) found that the majority adopted an exclusive approach to talent management resulting in integrated and selective human resource management systems. For some, this involved an 'exclusive-people' focus on certain groups of high-performing or high-potential people, whilst for others it meant an 'exclusive-position' focus on certain key positions in the organization. A minority of organizations had an inclusive approach and a few were more organizationally focused moving towards a social capital perspective (Iles et al., 2010).

The challenge facing HRD and talent management professionals is that, in spite of this continuing debate about the meaning of talent and talent management, there is an expectation from the organization's executives that those associated with delivering talent management will add value to the achievement of organization goals. For some, the expectation is to become talent factories (Ready and Conger, 2007), ensuring a continuing supply of people to fill key positions. This will require a dual focus, first a focus on functionality (rigorous talent processes that support strategic and cultural objectives) and second, a focus on vitality (the emotional commitment of managers, reflected in daily actions). Yet, for others, the objective of their talent strategy will be operational - to provide replacements or successors to key positions; to attract and retain graduates; to deliver management and leadership development. Both the importance of talent and its effective management are critical success factors (Vaiman et al., 2012) that will be shaped by an organization's context including the evolution and cultural attributes of the organization and the unique characteristics of the competitive environment.

Therefore, to resolve many of the issues organizations face when developing their talent strategy there is a need to ensure an alignment with their own context. Each organization will have a different starting point from others, as such, a different set of expectations of what is meant by and what is included under the headings of talent strategy and management. Given these differences, organizations will adapt academic insight and practical learning to their own experiences. Despite these differences, strategists and decision makers in the organization need to consider the following issues: how well is talent and talent management understood and supported in the organization? And how effective is the organization at executing talent strategy — i.e. turning the concept into practice?

A Construct for Assessing the Effectiveness of Talent Management — the Talent Management Evolution Matrix

Developing a talent strategy and associated talent management activity will be heavily influenced by both the environment in which the organization operates and the position of that organization in respect of its talent management evolution. It will depend on both the definition of talent and the objectives set within the organization for talent management. Once these have been identified then it will be incumbent on those delivering the strategy to ensure coherence between idea, strategy and execution, an alignment critical to success. As we have described above, coherence and consistency in approach are not always in evidence in the field of talent management.

In response to this and to provide a framework against which a talent strategy can be delivered, a talent management evolution matrix was developed in 2014 and 2015 and subsequently used to facilitate discussions about talent strategy in organizations (Turner, 2015: a and b) across the UK, Europe and the Middle East. The matrix is based on the assumption that there are two important sets of criteria in determining the position of an organization in respect of its talent management (and see also Figure 1). The first is the extent to which talent is understood to be an important consideration in the delivery of an organization's strategy and the way in which it manages its people; the level of executive and management knowledge and commitment; and the level of resourcing and workforce engagement. These factors form the basis of the first requirement of the talent management evolution matrix i.e. **conceptual acceptance**, which became one of two axes on the matrix. include the extent of agreement on the definition of talent, the extent of agreement on the definition and scope of talent management, the roles and responsibilities of senior executives for talent management, and the measures that are used to monitor the process of talent management.

The second is how well an organization delivers, or is resourced to deliver, its talent management programmes and activities. Coherence in delivery means "the balancing of natural internal competition to get there first or to show more benefits than others against the need to make the idea one that is accepted enthusiastically throughout the organization" (Turner and Kalman, 2014: 131). This is referred to in the talent management evolution matrix as **practical implementation**. Initial dialogue with talent practitioners suggests the need to assess the degree to which talent management and its associated activity are aligned to business goals as well as the level of coordination of actions and policies within and without the talent management function. In addition, there is a need to consider the extent to which talent management roles are delineated and understood amongst people management specialists and their respective organization managers. On this axis, a full suite of well-supported leadership programmes, a wide range of online training options, useful career maps and transparency in opportunity (membership of projects, job moves and so on) would result in a high rating on the scale of practical implementation. Once again, agreement of practical implementation is contextual, will use benchmarking data as 'evidence' and will have the support of executives and managers in its determination.

Within the talent management evolution matrix, individual organizations self-assess their position on the conceptual acceptance scale. HRD and talent management professionals can provide evidence of what takes place in other organizations through their own benchmarking and this can provide some kind of talent context in which the discussion about progress can be made. The important assumption is that the process of establishing conceptual acceptance is

an inclusive one; that it has the support of executives and managers and there is an element of workforce feedback — possibly through performance management data or employee attitude or climate surveys. Once the terms of reference for the two axes have been agreed, the organization will be able to identify their current position and decide a target point for the future, crafting a talent strategy accordingly. The following narrative shows how the matrix was used to evaluate talent management evolution in organizations operating in the finance and energy sectors in Oman.

Implementation of the Talent Management Evolution Matrix in the Omani Context

Semi structured interviews were conducted with business executives, line managers, talent management professionals and HR generalists in the Omani finance and energy sectors. Each of the organizations reviewed had well-developed systems of talent management crafted against the idiosyncrasies of Oman's institutional environment.

A particular feature of Oman is its Omanisation policy, a government initiative requiring 90% of positions to be filled with Omani people, suggesting a greater focus on the attraction, retention and development of talent. Social and cultural pressures, perceived career opportunities and the chance for further investment in skills have resulted in a strong inclination to work in the government (public) sector rather than the private sector (Al-Ali, 2006; Al-Lamki, 1998; Budhwar and Mellahi, 2006). Skill shortages have led to increasing competition amongst organizations and even the finance sector faces tough competition from both the government and new banks in attracting and retaining talented local people. This is aggravated by the inability of higher education institutions to train sufficient graduates to meet current and future demand (Supreme Council for Planning, 2012). In summary, the context for talent and talent management in Oman is a complex one that has heightened the competition for talent and therefore the need for a more a nuanced and strategic approach to talent management.

Conceptual Acceptance and Talent Management in Oman

The first factor in understanding conceptual acceptance was to identify how organizations in Oman defined talent and whether this definition was accepted and understood organization wide. Our findings show that external, institutional and internal organizational pressures have significant effect on the definition of talent and the shaping of the approach to talent management. Amongst these were government regulation, competition, and the nature of the labour market and the philosophy of the organization.

The effect of these forces on the incidence and the definition of talent was marked. At a macro level, each of these organizations were translating and responding to the Omanisation policy — developing talent management systems to support and increase the employment of a local workforce. On a micro level, those in the finance sector equated talent to those with high potential, an exclusive approach that was people-centred; whilst those in the energy sector regarded talent as those with critical skills — a more role-focused approach and a more inclusive definition of talent management. In the finance sector the exclusive approach focused on the need for leadership skills in response to growing competition. The inclusive approach in the energy sector

was a response to changing business requirements where the production of oil has moved from the primary to the secondary stage, a complexity that requires a technically skilled workforce.

Conceptual acceptance is also driven by a long-term focus in both sectors and an emphasis on business sustainability. Talent management was increasingly used for succession planning purposes, in order to produce a sufficient pool of competent and knowledgeable employees at different managerial levels. However, business sustainability in operational terms also led to a consideration of broader corporate social responsibilities including a conscious reduction in Oman's unemployment rate, the development of local people who are able to access more stable careers and therefore influence competitiveness at a national level. Thus in Oman, talent management is not only driven by business need but a sense of responsibility to the country as a whole.

The findings indicate that 'talent' is a dynamic concept that is defined according to the internal and external operating pressures of the organization. They also indicate that strong external (political and labour market) pressures have created a demand from organizations for a strategic focus on talent. Therefore, the finance and energy sectors in Oman show a relatively high level of conceptual acceptance of talent management.

Practical Implementation in Talent Management in Oman

Definitions of talent management shape the operationalisation of talent management practices. Yet, while the broader conceptualizations of talent management differed (more exclusive in the finance sector and more inclusive in the energy sector), in practice, both sectors adopted hybrid approaches through a differentiated talent management architecture that included all Omani workers. Through a range of assessment measures employees were offered a diverse range of training and development opportunities. In this way it was possible to allocate what was perceived as the right 'talent' to the right development opportunity. This is a major consideration when looking at the second axis of the talent management evolution grid i.e. practical implementation. This approach enabled the development of specific talent management practices that were related directly to higher level positions, but other talent management practices focused on all Omani employees (to comply with Omanisation policy), ensuring an effective means through which talent could be deployed to different positions while at the same time adhering to a culture of fairness within the workforce.

In this approach to talent management, the identification stage is critical. This is consistent with other research on the area and is an important stage for ensuring that the right talent is allocated to the right position (McDonnell, 2011). Thus, organizations use different assessments including tests for reasoning ability, interviews, consideration of work experience and qualifications in order to allocate each employee to the right level.

Practices also included:

- Competency frameworks for different layers of the organization.
- Assessment centres using psychometric testing, interviews and case-studies. While it is expected that assessment criteria will differ according to the specific characteristics of the organization, both sectors considered age, nationality, experience and performance,