WHAT ROLE CAN A TRAINING NEEDS ANALYSIS PLAY IN ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE?

MSc in Training and Human Resource Management

2003

Jacqueline Reed
Abstract

This research set out to examine how the process for developing a training needs analysis tool could influence organisational change. In addition, consideration was given to how the training needs analysis process can help get people on board with organisational change and be a change intervention in itself. The organisation that is the subject of this research is a large, complex health system which is in transition from a traditional bureaucratic, hierarchy with a command and control management style to a more participative, people centred approach. The organisation is operating in an environment of almost constant change with major national restructuring of the health services expected imminently. A processual, organisation development, action research based approach to the development of a training needs analysis process was taken in the study so that the changes desired in the organisation could be modelled in the first instance and secondly, in order to learn and understand more about what works and does not in order to continuously develop and progress the change agenda. In order to do this a parallel structure was established through which to progress the process which was tracked in an action research process. In addition, a series of interviews were conducted with top and senior management in order to ascertain their views about the process, its necessity, roles in relation to it, its potential benefits and how to introduce the process across the organisation. The research is reported in the format of an action research approach case study. The term learning and development needs analysis was adopted during the course of the study rather than training needs analysis. This was part of a strategy to broaden the focus of training and development in the organisation beyond the traditional training course.

The action research approach used in this research helped to highlight the significant impact the dynamics of hierarchy and the legacy of a bureaucratic, autocratic system has on the way a system operates and how people react to change and participation.

A number of key points emerged from the research:

1. The culture and change issues arising during the development of the learning and development needs analysis process were very significant.

2. The development and piloting of the needs analysis process needed to be approached as a change management process.

3. Linking the needs analysis process with existing organisational processes was a key factor in the success of the process and created a strategic dimension.

4. In a large, complex organisation a balance must be struck between standardisation and customisation of the needs analysis process to allow for the different structures, subcultures and levels of readiness in the organisation.

Key words: Training needs analysis, organisational change, organisational development, public service.
Contents

1.0 Introduction 5

2.0 Literature Review 11
   2.1 Training needs analysis 11
   2.2 Shift to Human Resource Development 21
   2.3 Examples of TNA processes 23
   2.4 Organisational change 27
   2.5 Reasons for resistance to change 32
   2.6 Organisational learning and change 37
   2.7 Change management in the public sector 40
   2.8 Parallel structures as a mechanism for change 43
   2.9 Theory of permeability of system boundaries 45

3.0 Methodology 47
   3.1 The participants 48
   3.2 The process 49
   3.3 The interviews 51
   3.4 Preparation and analysis of data 52
   3.5 Research design 54

4.0 Results 55
   4.1 Entry and Contracting 57
   4.2 Diagnosis 60
   4.3 Planning 68
   4.4 Action 72
   4.5 Evaluation 77
   4.6 Findings from interviews 83
5.0 Discussion and conclusions 92
6.0 References 99
7.0 Bibliography 109
8.0 Appendices 119
   i) Interview schedule 119
   ii) Sample minutes 120
   iii) Evaluation questionnaire 126
1.0 Introduction

The conduct of a training needs analysis is generally recognised in the literature as the first step in any professional approach to training. It is the foundation or starting point for any successful training intervention and is taken as the norm. However, despite the seemingly universal agreement that a thorough training needs analysis should underpin all training plans and budgets the literature also acknowledges that it does not often take place and is often not done in organisations. Furthermore, there appears to be no research as to why this may be the case. Much of the literature on training needs analysis focuses on various methodologies or approaches that may be taken. Some acknowledgement is made of the fact that a training needs analysis as outlined in the systematic approach to training is in fact, time consuming and costly particularly if conducted on an organisation wide basis.

In the literature a number of different terms are encountered in this area with similar and differing meanings depending on the author. Identification of training needs, training needs assessment, training needs analysis are all terms found in the literature. For the purposes of this study the term “Training Needs Analysis” will be used and taken to mean the process of gathering, assessing and analysing data to determine the training needs for an organisation. Later on in this study, the term Learning and Development Needs Analysis has been adopted, although this term is not generally found in the literature. This term was decided upon within the organisation that is the subject of this study. It was deliberately chosen as part of a
strategy, to broaden the focus of training and development in the organisation beyond the traditional training courses.

Within the organisation, there is a predominant tendency to think of training in terms of courses only and this has been reinforced through the role played to date by the training function. Much of the literature around training needs analysis focuses on specific needs analysis for specific organisational purposes. There is general agreement that training needs analysis should take place at the level of the organisation, the job or group and the individual. Again however, there is little in the literature relating to the conduct of an organisation wide training needs analysis in a large complex organisation, for the purposes of determining the overall and specific area training need, in order to develop appropriate plans, which enable the provision of “the learning opportunities required to achieve the goals of the organisation” (Boydell and Leary 1996).

Furthermore, there is little if any consideration given to change issues which may arise in introducing a training needs analysis process in an organisation. A number of texts (Boydell and Leary, Garavan et al., 1995 and Reid and Barrington 1999) mention the sensitivity required and the fact that people can be sensitive about training needs analysis, particularly as it can highlight areas of deficit. Research by Anderson (1994) and Holton et al., (2000) both address training needs analysis in terms of a change process. Anderson (1994) proposes an action research based approach, viewing training needs analysis as a systems intervention and Holton et al., (2000) attempt a large scale training needs analysis process. Holton et al., (2000) noted that compromises had to be made in terms of choices re training needs
analysis to accommodate change and cultural issues. None of the literature addresses the concept, that conducting a training needs analysis in itself could have any impact or role in overall organisational change. This dissertation sets out to explore how, in a time of organisational change a training needs analysis process can get people on board with the change and be a change intervention in itself.

The subject organisation is a large complex health system, employing in excess of 10,000 employees in a vast range of positions and grades, covering the full spectrum of health services from hospital to community, to mental health, to elderly care. The organisation is in the relatively early stages of transition from a traditional bureaucratic hierarchy with an autocratic command and control management style, to a more participative style of management. This transition is mirrored nationally and is targeted in the National Health Strategy (2001) and Action Plan for People Management (2002). At the present time, the organisation is operating in a period of more or less continuous change from internal and external sources, with political pressures, high demands for services and quality from the public and ongoing resource issues. The entire Irish National Health system is entering what is signalled as a period of major structural change and three Government commissioned reports, which should set the scene for the future change are imminently due to be published. The organisation has previously conducted want surveys for specific groups of staff and otherwise identified training needs, on the basis of conversations or written communication with senior management. It has responded to employee and specific group requests, however a more formal training needs analysis process represents a major development and a new departure.
The Human Resource function within the organisation is also in a period of transition from a traditional Personnel function model to strategic Human Resource Management. To that end a number of new appointments were made in the past eighteen-month period. A Director of Human Resources, a Corporate Learning and Development Manager and most recently a Corporate Employee Relations Manager have been put in place with a specific role to take a strategic approach to the HR and HRD functions. A number of local Human Resource Officers have also been appointed to develop structures for the devolution of elements of the HR function to local sites. The organisation has had an individual assigned to training since its inception thirty years ago, but until very recent times the appointment has been at a lower administrative level, dealing primarily with approvals and funding for course attendance and organisation of some in house training courses. For many years the function was managed by someone with a number of other briefs and has only in the last few years been developed as a unit in its own right within HR. Most recently the author has been appointed as Corporate Learning and Development Manager to lead the training function and develop a strategic approach to learning and development in the organisation.

The key change areas for the organisation at the present time are as follows:

- Participation – this includes a move towards a people centred approach to both staff and service users, a participative management style, increased and improved communication and a partnership approach to work and developments.
- Learning organisation culture – shifting from a blame culture to one of learning from mistakes, reflective practice, trying new things, innovation and creativity, risk taking and an action learning/research approach to new projects.
- Encouraging individual responsibility and ownership around learning.
- A strategic approach to HR generally and in the context of this research to learning and development in particular. A shift from a reactive to a proactive approach and the encouragement and development of the line manager role in relation to people management and development.
- Increased collaboration and cooperation across the organisation – increased teamwork and a decrease in fragmentation and competitiveness.

In making the shifts and changes outlined above the goal is to get people on board and engaged in new developments and moving away from the dependency culture, fragmentation and other elements associated with hierarchical bureaucracies, into a more participatory learning approach.

The key research questions are:

1. In a time of organisation change how does the process for developing a training needs analysis tool influence organisational change?
2. How can a training needs analysis process help get people on board with the organisational change?

A processual, organisation development, action research based approach to the development of a training needs analysis process is taken in this study, so that the changes desired in the organisation may be modelled in the first instance, and
secondly in order to learn and understand more about what works and does not work in order to continuously develop and progress the change agenda.

To do this, what is termed a parallel learning structure was established through which to progress the process. Organisation Development literature outlines a theory of parallel learning structures whereby a representative group in an organisation may be freed to explore and address an organisational problem or change. “Parallel learning structures are a mechanism to facilitate innovation in large bureaucratic organisations where the forces of inertia, hierarchical communication patterns and standard ways of addressing problems inhibit learning, innovation and change. In essence parallel structures are a vehicle for learning how to change the system and then leading the change process.” (French and Bell 1999:94)

The process of developing the training needs analysis process was tracked in an action research process by the author, who was a full participant in the process. In addition, a series of sem-structured interviews were conducted with top and senior management to ascertain their views about the process, its necessity, roles in relation to it, its potential benefits and how to introduce the process across the organisation. The interviews also contributed to the process of further developing senior management buy in to the process. This dissertation will be reported in the format of an action research approach case study.
2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Training Needs Analysis

Training needs analysis is considered to be the foundation of all training activities. In order to deliver appropriate, effective training which meets the needs of individuals and the organisation and represents value for money a training needs analysis is essential (Boydell and Leary 1996, Reid and Barrington 1999). There is general agreement in the literature that a training needs analysis is a best practice first step in the systematic approach to training (Wills 1998, Boydell and Leary 1996, Reid and Barrington 1999, Garavan et al., 1995, Bartram and Gibson 1997, 1999, Reay 1994).

The systematic approach to training is the predominant model found in the literature (CLMS M 2 U6, Wills 1998, Buckley and Caple 1995, Boydell and Leary 1996, Reid and Barrington 1999, Garavan et al., 1995). The systematic approach is described slightly differently by different authors, with varying stages and elements but there are a number of core features to the approach. The systematic approach is one which involves considering the linkages between the parts of the training process. There is an assumption that training must be planned in a cyclical or processual manner and that this approach will lead to high quality, planned training (CLMS, Buckley and Caple 1995, Barrington and Reid 1999, Wills, 1998, Bartram and Gibson 1999). Bartram and Gibson (1999:107) state that a “systematic approach to identifying training needs ensures that people are offered opportunities to learn which are efficient and effective”. All of the systematic approaches outlined in the literature outline a number of steps in the process and cover similar basic elements;
determining the training need, choosing appropriate methods to address the identified need, planning, implementing and evaluating. The benefit of this approach, as outlined in the literature, is that nothing is left out and there is a planned and professional approach. It also provides data necessary to justify or explain to senior management what training is required, what budgets are needed, what they are spent on and what the impact is for the organisation (Wills 1998).

While the structure of the systematic approach has a certain appeal in that there is a structured and logical step by step process to follow, there is a danger that all energy could be focussed on the system and the relationship of the various elements within it to the detriment of the original purpose, namely to provide the necessary training to the organisations employees to enable them to work in the most optimal manner (CLMS M2 U6, Wills 1998).

The term training need as outlined in the various texts inevitably comes back to the assumption that there is a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes required for a job and that training needs analysis should identify what they are, assess the current level of knowledge, skills and attitudes and that the resulting gap is therefore the training need.

In reviewing the literature on training needs analysis it is quickly apparent that it is dominated by approaches and methodologies for conducting a needs analysis. Herbert and Doverspike (1990) noted the large amount of training needs analysis literature and the significant degree of overlap in the descriptive and prescriptive literature. Chiu et al., (1997) conducted a literature review and analysis on training
needs analysis. They found that the literature is dominated by supply led initiators of training needs analysis, such as trainers and academics. They also note that the literature is full of recommendations for how to conduct a training needs analysis. Further, they note that the methods used are generic in nature, for example, interviews, surveys and that these methods may not be able to meet the newer demands on training needs analysis to integrate with corporate strategy and focus on future needs. Of the few studies which have introduced new methods they cite Anderson’s (1994) action research approach. They note that there are no empirical studies to validate methods.

McGehee and Thayer (1961) are widely acknowledged as the seminal text on training needs analysis and are quoted in much of the literature. They outlined the analysis of training need at the level of the organisation, group and individual and these levels continue to form the foundation of most approaches. The traditional approach to training needs analysis outlines a number of steps. The following are drawn from the main formats found in the literature (Reay 1998, Boydell and Leary 1996, Reid and Barrington 1999, Wills 1998)

1. Determine the area of focus for the training needs analysis or the customer.
2. Determine and plan the method(s) of data collection.
3. Collect the data.
4. Analyse and interpret the data.
5. Propose and prioritise solutions or actions.

Despite the overwhelming agreement in the literature that training needs analysis is an essential step in the training process there is also general agreement that this step is frequently ignored, skipped or not attended to (Wills 1998, Bartram and Gibson 1999, Schneier et al., 1988, Gray et al., 1997, McClelland 1993, Boydell and Leary 1996, Garavan et al., 1995). Wills (1998:27) states that “identifying training needs is the starting point for managing the training process. Yet this is often one of the last steps to be considered seriously – probably because a proper needs analysis is both difficult and time consuming.”

While there is no research reported as to why organisations do not always conduct full training needs analysis many authors cite the significant investment of time and resources required to conduct a traditional analysis (Holton et al., 2000, Anderson 1994, Schneier et al., 1988, Reid and Barrington 1999, Boydell and Leary 1996, Garavan et al., 1995). Schneier et al., (1988) suggest that training needs analysis are not conducted because trainers lack the specific knowledge required to conduct
one. They also suggest that there may be an issue of lack of belief in the effectiveness of the process.

Many difficulties are cited in the literature with traditional approaches. Wills (1998), notes that trainers can become so focussed on the system or training cycle that they lose sight of organisational objectives. There is also a tendency to focus on the skills level only and on deficits, resulting in a generally negative approach and one that may be threatening to staff members (CLMS M2 U6). Furthermore, many of the approaches use techniques such as job and task analysis. These methods involve detailed analysis of the skills required to complete particular jobs or tasks. They are hugely time consuming and focus on the present situation only. They yield static data or a snapshot of a given point in time and are not really preparing staff, or the organisation, for future challenges or changes. These approaches are only of benefit in stable situations where no changes are expected. It is likely that by the time these processes are completed changes could already have occurred in the demands of the jobs analysed (CLMS M2 U6, Anderson 1994, Hayton 1990, Reid and Barrington 1999). Reid and Barrington (1999:155) suggest that in view of this ever changing picture, perhaps the question should be “how can we develop people to develop themselves?”

Although the systematic approach to training needs analysis was envisaged to be conducted on three levels (organisation, personal and occupational), there was never any real integration of the levels in practice (CLMS M2 U6, Wills 1998, Bartram and Gibson 1999, Boydell and Leary 1996, Holton et al., 2000). Traditional training needs analysis focussed primarily on individual needs with detailed analysis happening at the individual level with the assumption that if individuals were sufficiently skilled to
do their jobs that would result in the achievement of organisational goals (CLMS M2 U6). The need to link training needs analysis to organisational objectives was not always seen and is considered one of the shifts that have taken place in the transition from traditional training to human resource development (CLMS M2 U6, Reid and Barrington 1999). Reid and Barrington (1999) make the point that Human Resource Development (HRD) should be an essential strategic element in how an organisation achieves its goals and objectives. The need to link training needs analysis fully to organisational goals and objectives is highlighted by many authors (Hayton 1990, Wills 1998, Boydell and Leary 1996, Garavan 1995, Schneier et al., 1988, Herbert and Doverspike 1990, Bartram and Gibson 1999).

Hayton (1990) cites problems with traditional methods of training needs analysis including those mentioned above and also states that non-training solutions tend to be ignored and the process tends not to involve consultation with employees and is usually management driven and focused. Potter et al., (2000) also describes a process where employees were not consulted and needs were identified only by supervisors and management. Gray et al., (1997) in a study of public health care found that in many organisations needs were identified by senior management and commented that this is problematic as managers are a step removed from day to day operations and may not have the most accurate picture of the actual requirements. Matthews et al., (2001) surveyed organisations around competency assessment requirements for ISO and found that training needs analysis was very management driven. They found training needs analysis dominated by senior management decisions and supervisors opinions. The most commonly used formal approach was the skills inventory.
Some training needs analyses are conducted by survey methodology, particularly where large numbers may be involved, in this situation there is a risk that what will be identified are wants rather than needs and again the potential for linking with organisational goals is weak (Holton et al., 2000, Gray et al., 1997). Anderson (1994:24) states that training is often based on wants rather than needs and can occur on an ad hoc basis which is not integrated with wider organisational goals and objectives. “General surveys of large populations are costly, time consuming and frequently meaningless” (Anderson 1994:25). Hayton (1990) sees the skills audit as a key component of training needs analysis but suggests that there is unlikely to be one best way which will suit all organisations.

Herbert and Doverspike (1990:268) raised issues around using appraisal data as part of training needs analysis and conclude that the use of this data may not achieve the intended goals. In a paper examining the weaknesses in conventional approaches to training needs analysis Leat and Lovell (1997) consider the weaknesses inherent in using performance appraisal data as a determinant of training needs. A drawback in using this data is noted in that the performance appraisal process is often linked to reward and promotion so that identifying development needs does not sit very well with this purpose. The paper goes into some depth about the biases which potentially exist in using performance appraisal for training needs analysis. An alternative approach is put forward which would have significant cultural and change implications which are not mentioned at all.
Wills (1998) discusses the need to meet both the needs of the individual and the organisation and suggests that corporate policies and strategies are the starting point for the analysis of both in order to align training and organisational direction. He also discusses the need for clarity around corporate mission, vision and strategy and the importance of senior management support.

Hayton (1990) discusses the need for skills audit to be linked with an organisation’s broader change strategy. Key recommendations he makes include involving employees in the process and linking skills audit to the company strategy. He also highlights the need for a simple approach which can be understood by employees, unions and management. He recognises the potential for industrial relations issues with skills audits.

Research by Hussey (CLMS 1999) looking at the use of education and training as a strategic driver found that only a third of firms surveyed linked the aims of their management development programmes to the achievement of organisational goals. The majority of firms identified needs through appraisals alone thus there was no explicit connection to the overall direction of the organisation’s strategy or goals. Hussey argued that if training was strategic the focus of training would change as strategic focus changed, however he found that training plans tended to be very stable thus indicating a lack of connectivity with strategic direction. Hussey recommended the closer integration of training with business strategy (CLMS 1999).

Research by Leicester 1988 (CLMS M2 U6) identified a key link between employee development and corporate strategy and found that the key variable was the quality
of human resource management (HRM). As the quality of HRM increased so did the link between staff development and corporate success. Leicester suggested that there may be three elements to achieving the integration of employee development and corporate strategy. One element is to have a performance appraisal system where objectives come from organisational objectives; mechanisms need to be in place to allow for employee self development and finally achieving a balance between training to meet organisational goals and training to meet individual need. Further, Leicester’s research suggested that employees were likely to be more adaptable where opportunities for self development are provided and it is given a relatively high priority (CLMS M2 U6).

Ferdinand (1988) in looking at management training needs analysis focussed on specific management groups and organisational challenges, outlining approaches that may fit the different management groups and organisational scenarios. He highlights that without due consideration to the context in which the training needs analysis is being conducted the form of the process and the outcomes from it may not be acceptable to the organisation or the key stakeholders.

Throughout the literature there is a general focus on methods and approaches but very little about the detail or process of implementing training needs analysis. A number of authors mention the need to consider the culture of the organisation or potential sensitivities or industrial relations issues but do not delve into the issue any further (Boydell and Leary 1996, Reid and Barrington 1999, Leat and Lovell 1997, Anderson 1994, Hayton 1990). Only Holton et al., (2000) and Anderson (1994) make a stronger mention of the change implications involved in a training needs
analysis process. Furthermore, only Holton et al., (2000) address the issue of attempting a training needs analysis in a large scale, complex, public service organisation. Almost all of the other literature focuses on training needs analysis for discrete purposes or in smaller more bounded contexts (Bartram and Gibson 1999, Boydell and Leary 1996, Ferdinand 1988, Gray et al., 1997, Zemke 1994). To give an example of the narrower focus that appears to be the received wisdom, McClelland (1993:12) suggests that “convincing senior management that a training needs analysis should be conducted so that training needs can be identified would probably not be specific enough to garner the necessary support”. McClelland (1993) suggests that support from senior management may be obtained by outlining the reason for training needs analysis and the example given is to maintain the ISO 9000 standard.

Ferdinand (1988), Bartram and Gibson (1999), Wright (1986), Boydell and Leary (1996) and Reid and Barrington (1999) all discuss the importance of considering the type of organisational culture, stage of development or model in considering the approach that may be best fit for the organisation. Reid and Barrington (1999:101) note that “training interventions often reflect the human assumptions built into the organisation in which people work” and consider Morgan’s (1997) typology of organisations. Three particular elements are cited; organisations as machines, organisms and brains. Each has different implications for how the organisation might learn. The organisation as machine – will tend to be mechanistic, operating as a bureaucracy with rules, procedures and teaching processes; organisation as brain – will tend to be a learning organisation and the focus will be on learning to learn; organisation as organism – will be open to the environment and therefore will not
subscribe to one best way and therefore training and development methods will vary through time and as appropriate to the challenge. Reid and Barrington (1999) suggest that generally training interventions will be within the existing learning system framework that operates in an organisation unless a major strategic plan is involved and note that “training and development is an important facilitator of organisational change” (Reid and Barrington 1999:148). Reid and Barrington (1999) point out that how needs are analysed will depend on many factors not least of which are the culture of the organisation and its stage of development. Gray et al., (1997) in discussing the selection of data collection methods make the point that it is important to secure management and employee acceptance for the method chosen.

2.2 The shift from traditional training roles to Human Resource Development

Many authors discuss those involved in training needs analysis and their roles. The different stakeholders in the process will have different interests and this factor needs to be taken into account (Boydell and Leary 1996). The importance of senior management involvement and endorsement is highlighted by many (Boydell and Leary 1996, Anderson 1994, Reid and Barrington 1999, Wills 1998). Boydell and Leary 1996, Garavan et al., 1995, Anderson 1994, Hayton et al., 1990 all identify a key role for those whose needs are being identified. Boydell and Leary (1996), Garavan et al., (1995) and Anderson (1994) discuss a change in the traditional trainer role in training needs analysis. The traditional trainers’ role in needs analysis is to be the needs investigator and take responsibility for determining the training needs. A continuum of roles is described in the literature with the balance of responsibility shifting from the training function to line managers moving along the continuum. The most recent shift in role would place the focus on the role of the line
manager in the needs analysis with the training function acting in a consultancy role (Boydell and Leary 1996, Garavan et al., 1995). In this latter scenario the line manager works with their staff who take an active role in determining their own learning needs.

The above mentioned shift in trainers’ roles in training needs analysis may be seen as part of an overall move from traditional training functions to a human resource development model. There is much in the literature on this topic however a few key points will be summarised here only. Grieves and Redman (1999) note the move from training to HRD in the 1990s and the evolution of HRD. HRD is now viewed in much of the literature as the basis of competitive advantage in the future (Walton 1999, Reid and Barrington 1999). Key elements of HRD found in the literature which distinguish it from the traditional training approach are; closer links between HRD and business strategy; devolving responsibility to line managers; requires that staff and managers take a new and different attitude towards training and development; and there is greater focus on the workplace as opposed to the classroom as the focus for learning (Grieves and Redman 1999, Walton 1999, Reid and Barrington 1999, Garavan 1995).

The philosophy underlying HRD is that learning is an ongoing everyday experience not something done to employees on an ad hoc basis. Grieves and Redman (1999) note that in HRD there is a common desire to promote learning cultures and transform organisations into learning organisations. HRD “involves employees accepting a move from dependence to independence, from passive and reactive learning to active and proactive learning and from viewing learning as a single event
managed by others to continual life-long, self-managed learning” (Grieves and Redman 1999:90).

HRD is seen as more focussed on the learning and development of the individual within organisations so that they might better cope with organisational change (Walton 1999). The general direction of HRD is seen to be around replacing more control oriented cultures with cultures supportive of learning and creativity (Grieves and Redman 1999). In a review of current people management activities of world class organisations Oakland and Oakland (2001) found that in top companies, managers had an active role in training support and delivery which was carefully linked to the needs of the organisation, departments and individuals.

2.3 Specific examples of training needs analysis processes

Two specific studies of training needs analysis processes will be outlined briefly as they are of direct relevance to the current study and each represents a departure from the general approach found in the literature.

Anderson (1994) takes the view that the role of the trainer will be increasingly as a facilitator of change and that the concepts implicit in the traditional approaches no longer apply. In particular, he highlights two major changes in the workplace. The first change is that training is becoming a more “organic learning experience rather than simply a didactic process” (Anderson 1994:23). His second point is that the concept of training for a job is no longer an appropriate focus as there is so much change in the nature of work, with jobs either disappearing or developing in new directions all the time. Anderson (1994:23) argues that “training is about helping
people to learn to work more effectively” and therefore skills such as reflection, discovery and insight are important. Such skills do not fit well with traditional job and task analysis approaches to training needs analysis. Anderson (1994:24) advocates a proactive action research approach as opposed to the traditional deficit model of training needs analysis, stressing that the focus should be on “future efficiency not past deficiencies”. In discussing methodologies Anderson is one of the few to mention the change aspects and implications for training needs analysis. He indicates that strategies for managing change need to be considered. “Needs analysis is a systems intervention in its own right and hence the implications of change need careful thought from the outset” (Anderson 1994:26). In advocating an action research approach to training needs analysis, Anderson views the data interpretation stage as a reflective stage for the synthesis of information and development of ideas. He sees a major shift in moving from training as a response to a problem to “training as an integral business strategy to prepare the organisation’s human resource base for inevitable change” (Anderson 1994:26). Anderson describes training needs analysis as a “process involving consultation, investigation and reflection” (Anderson 1994:26). Anderson’s view is that if training is to become part of the normal business of an organisation it must be collaboratively designed and strategically oriented. He therefore recommends an action research model as opposed to a descriptive survey research model for conducting training needs analysis. “A reactive, problem based approach to needs analysis and HRD planning is no longer sufficient” (Anderson 1994:27). “Through reflecting the organisation back to itself we force it to see itself in a new way” (Anderson 1994:26).
In a case study of large scale performance driven training needs assessment, Holton et al., (2000) report on a project to assess the performance improvement training needs of the staff of the Louisiana state government. This piece of research is particularly relevant to the current study and for this reason is reported in greater depth. The specific criteria for the needs analysis process the state government wanted were as follows:

- It must be linked to performance improvement
- It must be capable of being used with all the organisations departments and be able to assess all the needs throughout the state government in a year.
- The process must be able to be cascaded through the organisation for future use by state employees themselves
- Must give all employees an opportunity for input. (Holton et al., 2000)

Holton et al., note that many public sector organisations are required to demonstrate greater “outcome accountability” (Holton et al., 2000:250). They indicate that organisations with traditional training departments focussing on delivering courses may need a large scale training needs analysis methodology to initiate a performance driven strategy. They note that “the needs assessment literature does not report such methodologies” and that the “characteristics of large organisations, such as many government agencies, present unusual challenges and often require special tools” (Holton et al., 2000:250). The conclusion from their literature search is that there is no one best approach to training needs analysis and that the literature offers a range of tools and guidelines but there is no discussion of large scale needs assessment. Holton et al., (2000) in trying to meet the challenges of the government agency they were working with considered a number of options. These included
performance analysis which although they considered effective would have required such a significant amount of resources to achieve it was not suitable. Typical training needs analysis methodologies such as task and job analysis were also considered unsuitable for a large scale organisation needs analysis. Overall the point is made that the detailed analyses described in the literature could not possibly be applied on a large scale without huge resources both in terms of funding and people.

In discussing lessons learned from their methodology Holton et al., (2000) indicate that the same conditions that created the need for a special approach to training needs analysis also created a dynamic that make it difficult to implement a process. These factors were:

- The organisation was not used to thinking strategically and identifying strategic goals was not easy.
- Needs assessment was a culture change process. The methodology selected by Holton et al., required the employees to ask hard questions about what works and what does not. In what is described as not a performance based culture this was threatening and some resisted this approach initially.
- Their clients needed education and training around the purpose and benefits of the needs assessment process so that they could ask the right question and gain the maximum benefit from the process.
- Employees were sceptical and needed reassurance around the benefits of the process and that the information was to be used for the stated purposes only.
- Commitment of management and employee time to the project and also to deliver on completion of the analysis. Raising expectations and then not delivering can be very destructive.
Holton et al., modified their approach to include an organisational change model. They found that “in many instance the technical nature of the needs assessment was less important than the dynamics of the change process” (Holton et al., 2000:261). Holton et al., (2000:262) stress that similar issues may arise in any organisation instituting a large scale process particularly where none existed before and that it is “vitally important that assessors realize they are not just engaging in needs assessment, but organisational change as well. If assessors view the situation only through a training needs assessment lens, they will miss critical, powerful organisational dynamics that will hurt their results.” Based on their findings Holton et al., (2000) make several recommendations for future research. Included in these is the need to develop more methodologies that span the gap between the more rigorous performance driven and felt needs surveys. They also recommend the development of more change oriented models and the development of methodology to assess the readiness of an organisation for such a process. Further, they did not find the traditional deficiency model worked well in the specific organisational culture and recommend development of alternative models. They noted that the transition to performance driven culture was harder in the public than the private sector they had experience of and recommend that attention must be given to the culture change process.

2.4 Literature on organisational change

There are a number of broad approaches to organisational change in the literature. Common types of change described in the literature are; gradual incremental change; intermittent incremental change; and discontinuous change (CLMS M2 U1, Hayes 2002). Different terminology is used by various writers but basically three distinct
types of change are described. The first is about slow gradual change that may be barely noticed, it is really an ongoing evolutionary process and happens in predictable systematic ways. Intermittent change is similar, except there are periods of stability and then periods where there is increased change. Discontinuous change is a pattern of radical change where there are major changes in structures, strategies or culture in an organisation (CLMS M2 U1, Hayes 2002).

Increasingly however the literature is acknowledging that many organisations are in a continuous process of change. White (2000:162), notes that there is a trend in the private sector “towards continuous and pervasive change and increasing interdependencies”. Wilkinson (1997) comments on the general trend of waves of change moving across the public service and links this to the overall global environment and Hartley et al., (1997) acknowledge the increasingly rapid changes taking place in organisations in both their internal and external environments. “Organisational change can no longer be conceived of as a one off event, or a temporary adjustment, but must be seen as a continuous process of adaptation to flux in the environment” (Hartley et al., 1997:61). This acknowledgement that we are now in an era of continuous change in demands and environment indicates that people need to be developed to be able to work with and cope with the prospect of continuous change and continuous performance improvement (CLMS M2 U1).

The literature also distinguishes between planned and emergent change. Planned models of organisational change would include programmes such as Total Quality Management (TQM) and Business Process Re-engineering (BPR). The planned, systematic approach at its extreme would suggest that change can be planned to such an extent that there is a smooth transition from the current to future state
Wilson (1992) describes this as an extreme and unattainable view of change which underlies much of the literature around change from the USA. Managed change programmes have met with limited success and there is a constant search for new approaches, new management techniques, and new ways to ensure success of the planned process (CLMS M2 U1). There are a number of criticisms of planned approaches to organisational change. These include the assumption that an organisation can change through following a series of planned steps. Further criticism arises around the fact that particular cultures and power relations are not considered. It may not be possible to reach consensus or agreed ways forward. Different organisations and situations will require different approaches to change. There is sense in the planned change models that one size will fit all (CLMS M2 U1, Wilkinson 1997, Kezar and Eckel 2002). The conventional change models have tended to downplay the “processual and ongoing nature of large-scale operational change” according to Dawson (1994:153). Dawson (1994) suggests that the success of any change process is dependent on many different variables which include the skills of the change agent. He also highlights the role of the manager and the change skills they require as well as the change agent (Dawson 1994).

In contrast to planned change models, organisation development (OD) models focus on the principle of achieving consensus and participation between individuals and the organisation (Wilson 1992). OD emerged in the 1960s as a way of looking at the effects of change on social processes and people. Two broad objectives are said to underlie the OD approach to organisational change; modifying behaviour patterns in the organisation and increasing the organisations ability to cope with changes (CLMS
Key features of the OD approach include; a methodology based on action research; a stakeholder approach to collaborative action, a belief that effective change requires participation; a pluralist frame of reference and acknowledgement of the political processes that help or hinder change; an appreciation of organisational culture and the embracing of humanist values (French and Bell 1999, Cummings and Worley 1997, Hamelin et al., 2001, Greeves 2000). The OD approach differs from the planned approach to change in a number of particular ways. Planned approaches are more task than process focussed, tend to be expert led with elements such as culture and politics seen as something to be managed rather than worked with and with an overall unitarist as opposed to pluralist frame of reference (Greeves 2000). In addition the focus would tend to be on training to support the change rather than on organisational learning and personal development (Greeves 2000).

The content, context and process of change have been identified as the key determinants of organisational transition (Dawson 1994, Pettigrew et al., 1992, Wilkinson 1997). The processual perspective on change views organisational change as complex and dynamic and not something that can be treated as a series of linear events (Dawson 1994, Pettigrew et al., 1992). Pettigrew et al., (1992) make the point that much of the literature on organisational change makes no reference to the history, context or process of change and in so doing does not allow the process of the change to reveal itself. Pettigrew et al., (1992:8) argue that “a view of process which combines rational, political and cultural elements has real power in explaining organisational continuity and change”. Process models of change put forward by Beckhard and Harris 1987, Lewin 1951, Westley 1958 all highlight the importance of diagnosis, strategies and plans and implementation (Hayes 2002). Beckhard and
Harris (1987) identify three general parts to organisational change; conception of the need to change, the process of organising the transition and the operation of new work practices and procedures. The emergent approach to change suggests change is not the sole preserve of change experts or facilitators but that every manager should have a role in organisational change. In addition the emergent approach changes the role of senior management from directors of change to “that of developing the workforce to ensure that it is able to identify the need for change and to take responsibility for implementing change” (CMLS M2 U1:49). Ghoshal and Bartlett (2000), Weick (2000) and Pettigrew (2000) debate the relative merits of planned versus emergent approaches. Pettigrew (2000) argues that change processes take on different characteristics at different phases of their implementation and furthermore, that environmental circumstances can render either planned or emergent approaches more appropriate at different times.

Wilkinson (1997:507) further notes that there is very little thorough research which seeks to understand “the factors which help or hinder the implementation of complex change in practice”. Much of the existing research is in the form of case histories which typically outline the successes of particular specific change projects. Wilkinson (1997) sees case studies of this type as problematic as typically little information around the process is provided and they deal with discrete changes paying little attention often to the many other events going on simultaneously in the organisation.

Schein (1999) cautions that a major conceptual error in change management is to separate diagnosis from intervention and that action research concepts are very important in change management. Scheins’ fundamental assertion that “you cannot
understand a system until you try to change it” is founded on the “assumption that everything we do with a client system is an intervention and that, unless we intervene, we will not learn what some of the essential dynamics of the system really are” (Schein 1999:64). Schein indicates that the human system is not amenable to be treated totally objectively and that this important insight seems to be ignored in much of the change literature. Hence, Schein argues that Lewins’ concept of action research is fundamental to any model of working with the human system. In suggesting that change is better defined as learning Schein states that “the involvement of the learner is crucial to any kind of planned change or, as we might better conceptualize it –“managed learning” (Schein 1999: 71).

Dawson (1994) suggests that change should be studied as it happens and advocates qualitative longitudinal research methods to help unpick the complex issues and elements involved in change and provide a greater understanding of some of the processes involved. He notes that “the pathways which companies follow do not reflect the objective rational decision making of key stakeholders, but rather the interrelationship between internal and external contextual factors, organisational politics, and the enabling and constraining properties of the type and scale of change being introduced.” (Dawson 1994:161).

2.5 Reasons for resisting change/ why change does not work

Despite all the literature on change management approximately 70% of change initiatives are reported to fail (Hamelin et al., 2001). It is useful to look at some of the reasons discussed in the literature.
According to Hayes (2002:57) “successful implementation of strategies can be threatened …when there is an over reliance on rational approaches that neglect cultural and political issues”. He further suggests that “stakeholders may resist any attempt to even consider the possibility that change might be required…organisation members might recognise the need for change but that might not be translated into a desire for change because they may fear it will disadvantage them” (Hayes 2002:58). Hayes (2002) outlines the following reasons for resisting change; parochial interest, misunderstanding and lack of trust, different assessments, and low tolerance for change. Wilkinson (1999:509) is critical of the failure in some of the literature to “recognise the complexities of organisational life” and as a result Wilkinson (1999:512) believes “much change management is doomed to disappointment because it simply fails to work with the messiness of real life”.

Hamlin et al., (2001) report that the main reasons stated for the failure of many change programmes are as follows:

- Change is viewed as a destination not a process.
- There is a lack of clear vision about the short term and long term goals.
- There is a legacy from previous organisational change programmes which may have been handled badly or failed associated with middle management inertia or resistance.
- Failure to provide the necessary encouragement, training and skills that enable employees to adapt and adjust to organisational change.
- Inadequate communication about the change, including giving information too gradually and the consequent risk of the grapevine getting the information out to people first.
- Focussing the change effort too narrowly on one aspect of the organisational equation and ignoring the interconnectedness of organisational life.
- Change management models can be subject to oversimplification as a result of lack of change agency expertise of those involved.

Hamelin et al., 2001.

Armenakis (1999:311) notes that “despite gaining initial success, a change initiative may nonetheless be ultimately rejected because top managers desire to distance themselves from the pain experienced by organisational members” in achieving the change. Senge (1999:9) notes that “most serious change initiatives eventually come up against issues embedded in our prevailing system of management. These include managers commitment to change as long as it doesn’t affect them; “undiscussable” topics that feel risky to talk about and the ingrained habit of attacking symptoms and ignoring deeper systematic causes of problems”. He discussed the importance of learning the capabilities to change which he describes as reflection and enquiry skills, systems thinking to help to see interdependencies. If these capabilities are not present that presents a fundamental limit to the ability to sustain change. Therefore Senge urges that building capabilities must be part of the change strategy.

Neumann (1989) in a paper looking at why people do not participate in organisational change describes structural, relational and societal explanations. Under structural reasons she outlines issues such as organisation design, work design and HR management. In the relational area, the issues outlined are, the management of participation, the dynamics of hierarchy, and individuals’ stance towards the organisation. In the societal domain there are primary and secondary explanations
and the individuals’ ideology of work. Neumann (1989) is really looking at factors in organisations that influence people’s ability to participate in decision making and change. She challenges the predominant view in the literature that looks for personality based reasons that people do not participate in organisational change. Neumann (1989) suggests that environmental conditions in the workplace can have a significant determining influence on whether people participate in organisational change. The argument is made that resistance to participating in decision making can lead to resistance to the decisions made through participative methods and practices (Neumann 1989).

Neumann’s explanations (1989:201) are as follows:

- The real decisions of the organisation are made outside the participative forum
- Individuals’ jobs do not require them to use participative decision-making
- Participating is not reinforced via the personnel mechanisms which communicate the organisations’ pivotal norms
- The participative effort is managed in such a way as to discourage participative competence
- Rank and status continues to be more important than mastery and competence
- Participating conflicts with non work roles and needs
- Deeply held beliefs and values are challenged by participating
- Adversarial politics, both in the past and present, lead to self protection
Two of Neumann’s reasons will be considered specifically here as they are seen to relate directly to the present study. The two key areas are the dynamics of hierarchy and HR management.

Neumann (1989:189) cites Lawler 1986 who suggests that there must be congruence between participative philosophy and HR practice in a number of areas. The areas are outlined as follows; organisational structure, job design, information systems, reward systems, personnel policies, career system, selection system and training orientation. These areas can either support participation or inhibit it. Neumann suggests that HR is the social control system in an organisation and that participative behaviour and decision making is about social control, hence the key link between the areas. Congruence in these areas sends a message that participative decision making is the norm and vice versa.

One of the relational explanations discussed by Neumann is the dynamics of hierarchy and she points out that “participative decision making challenges hierarchy as a dysfunctional approach to organising authority” (1989:192). However these dynamics, all be it dysfunctional, do not encourage either managers or their staff to participate. For a manager there are risks in sharing power and authority in a system where authority is based on position rather than competence. Hierarchical organisations tend to engender competition and conflict among members for scarce resources, those in authority have the power to decide and others develop mechanisms to protect themselves and run down others in order to get access to the resources (Neumann 1989). In theory participative decision making should improve such a situation however as Neumann further points out the alienation, frustration
and conflict within hierarchical systems can make participative systems difficult to implement. One of the reasons for this is that in a hierarchy decisions and authority are based on position and in a participative model competence is the basis of authority (Neumann 1989). Both managers and subordinates may perceive they have something to lose in a participative model. Managers risk power, authority and security and for others “a lifetime of dependency and impotence is not transformed via ‘participation by command’ and the presence of an authority figure saves the subordinate from having to take total responsibility for her actions, holding peers accountable, or struggling with the uncertainty of managing herself” (Neumann 1989:194). Neumann (1989:194) further notes that “hierarchical assumptions are so deeply embedded in organisational life that even a slight movement toward participation evokes resistance”. Support is required for managers to enable them to support and work with a participative model, particularly important is involving them in the whole development and design of such schemes and supporting and training them (Neumann 1989). In addition, employees “need encouragement and support for unlearning the dependency shaped over a lifetime in hierarchies” (Neumann 1989:194). “Going from a bureaucratic, hierarchical organisation towards one that uses participative decision-making is a significant change,” (Neumann 1989:207).

2.6 Organisational learning and change

Much literature exists about the learning organisation and organisational learning and there are many debates. The intention here is merely to outline the concepts briefly and look at their application to organisational change in the context of this study.
Pedler et al., (1988:1) define a learning organisation as one “which facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself”. Senge (1990) in his seminal text on the learning organisation suggests that all organisations need to chart a path towards a culture of continuous improvement. In relation to organisational change a key theoretical argument of Senge is that “organisations are the product of the ways that people in them think and interact and to change them for the better you must give people the opportunity to change the ways they think and interact” (Senge 1999:33). He points out this cannot be achieved by either command and control or visionary leadership or increased training. Senge (1999:33) sees these goals being achieved through real life tasks such as new management approaches and new approaches to how people work. If these involve people in taking part they will, according to Senge, develop an “enduring capability to change”.

Schein (1999) states that his thinking on change has evolved from a model of planned change to a concept of managed learning. Schein (1999:60) operates from a belief that “all forms of learning and change start with some form of dissatisfaction or frustration generated by data that disconfirm our expectations or hopes”. He points out that we can ignore this information and that to move to action it must be accompanied by a level of anxiety that for example if we do not change we will fail in some way. People become defensive in learning or change because we have to admit that something is wrong or not perfect. “Learning anxiety is a fundamental restraining force” and dealing with this is a key to achieving change (Schein 1999:60).
Antonacopoulou (2001) examined the interrelationships between training, learning and change. She found that “managers have come to believe that learning is training and more specifically, that learning is going on courses”. Paradoxically the managers in her study also found that training was a barrier to learning in that the timing, structure and match with learners and provision of opportunity to explore and question was inadequate. Antonacopoulou’s findings indicate that structured training is not always a learning opportunity.

Preskill and Torres (1999:92) explored the role of evaluative enquiry in creating learning organisations and proposed that “traditional forms of evaluation be re-conceptualised as evaluative enquiry for organisational learning”. They propose that evaluative enquiry could be an approach to “understanding, improving and changing organisational life” (Preskill and Torres 1999:93). They identified a number of processes at the core of evaluative enquiry and these are; asking questions; identifying and challenging values, beliefs and assumptions; reflection; dialogue; collecting, analysing and interpreting data; action planning and; implementation. Through these processes Preskill and Torres (1999) suggest that organisations may progress through single and double loop learning and deutero learning as described by Argyris and Schön (1978). Further, they suggest that evaluation can play a powerful role in organisational learning if integrated into organisational culture. Preskill and Torres (1999) see evaluative enquiry as a process for learning in organisations and as an organisational learning approach to organisational change (Preskill and Torres 1999). Through this proposed process outlined above people can be encouraged to engage actively in the evaluation process. Through the process many of the elements required to develop a learning culture and
subsequently change may be developed, modelled and encouraged. Reflection is critical to organisational learning and an element often perceived as a luxury in today’s pressure driven workplace, it is also an area that needs to be developed in large organisations that have yet to make the shift from being reactive to proactive.

The concept of the learning organisation as applied to the transformation of the public sector is explored by Finger and Burgin-Brand (1999). They argue that public sector organisations are particularly slow to change and that because of that transformation of the public sector must be conceptualised as a collective learning process. “In our view public sector organisations are not qualitatively different from private sector organisations, but they operate in a more difficult environment, which makes their functioning and their management more complex” (Finger and Burgin-Brand 1999:131). They also find that for historical reasons public sector organisations tend to be more bureaucratic and as such are a challenge to those wishing to introduce learning organisation concepts into management practice. They further note that those writing about learning organisations refer to the private sector only. Finger and Burgin-Brand (1999) see organisational learning as a process which contributes to organisational transformation and suggest that to create a learning organisation, individual and collective learning must be explicitly linked to the strategic objectives of the organisation.

2.7 Change management in the public sector

Pettigrew et al., (1992:5) argue that private sector concepts cannot be just “mechanistically trundled across the sectoral divide as significant differences remain
between the two sectors particularly in the degree of politicization and the power and social position of the professionals."

Worral et al., (2000) in a study of the impact of organisational change on the work experience and perceptions of public sector managers notes that application of private sector models of change into the public sector without modification or reflection can be very difficult given the fundamental differences between the two sectors. They state that recent research has indicated that many change models do not take public sector issues into account. The need to balance private sector approaches with public sector values is noted in the literature (Stewart and Walsh 1992, White 2000). Robertson and Seneviratne (1995) found that bringing about change in the public sector was much more difficult than in the private sector. Worral et al., (2000) found very significant and profound differences in managers’ perceptions of change in the private and public sector. The study by Worral et al., (2000) found that the effects of change on public sector managers were a reported decrease in loyalty, morale, motivation and job security. The public sector was considered to be strongly bureaucratic, cautious and traditional in management style and more authoritarian, centralised, secretive, reactive and vacillating. In addition in the public sector there was low employee morale, a blame culture, information overload, a feeling that employee well being was not taken seriously, a lack of resources and the belief that management does not walk the talk. Pettigrew et al., (1992) acknowledge that health services are characterised by a number of strong professional occupational coalitions which are all struggling for scarce resources and hence there is significant potential for conflict. Watad et al., (1999), describe health care as having “messy problems” with complex organisational designs including
elaborate divisions of labour, one of the unintended consequences of which is fragmentation.

White (2000) suggests that both the private and public sectors are following the same trends towards continuous change and increasing interdependencies. In the UK of the 1980s and 1990s public services were uncoordinated and fragmented but now there is a major push for joint accountability, partnership and coordination (White 2000). As a result managing change has become very important in the public sector. In the UK the public sector is trying to adapt in very turbulent times and has been subject to cuts in government spending along with increasing demands for enhanced efficiency and effectiveness (White 2000). As the literature indicates, new things are expected of the public sector in the UK, and a similar situation now pertains in Ireland. There is a need to work in new partnerships and think strategically, network more with other agencies, manage resources effectively, be accountable and transparent and define the boundaries of systems (White 2000, Department of Health and Children 2001, 2002). White (2000) notes that common processes such as Business Process Reengineering do not tend to work in the public sector as they do not fit the demands. Some of the reasons stated for this are that these planned processes ignore the context and the public involvement which is required in the future and cannot keep pace with the rate at which changes are happening (White 2000). White (2000) notes the general agreement in the change literature that an “effective model for change should accommodate and encourage ongoing interaction, i.e. it must be iterative and based on experimentation and learning rather than being a static process” (White 2000:166). Therefore any change strategy should allow for planned and emergent change and have a participative approach.
2.8 Parallel structures as a mechanism for organisational change initiatives

Parallel structures are described in the organisation development (OD) literature as a methodology for involving those in organisations “in resolving ill-defined complex problems and to build adaptability into bureaucratic organisations” (Cummings and Worley 1997). French and Bell (1999) describe parallel structures as “specially created organisational structures for planning and guiding change programs”. “Parallel learning structures are a mechanism to facilitate innovation in large bureaucratic organisations where the forces of inertia, hierarchical communication patterns, and standard ways of addressing problems inhibit learning, innovation, and change. In essence parallel structures are a vehicle for learning how to change the system and then leading the change process” (French and Bell 1999). Both French and Bell (1999) and Cummings and Worley (1997) describe how parallel structures allow time for reflection and problem solving and for organisation members to work in different ways to the day to day norms of the organisation. In this way the parallel structures are seen to facilitate organisational change. They note that management tend to control most of the variables around employee involvement in parallel structures, for example the amount of authority, who is involved, the flow of information and training opportunities provided. Because of this, parallel structures are seen as particularly useful in situations where bureaucratic, hierarchical structures exist. They are seen as a good starting point for organisations with no real history of participative practices.

According to French and Bell (1999) most change programmes in large scale systems use parallel learning structures. Some of the key features of parallel structures are that; information channels are open thus facilitating speedy exchange
of information without having to go through the formal communication channels; those within the parallel structure can be assisted in problem solving by anyone in the formal organisation; and information from the parallel structure is fed into the formal structure where ultimate decision making takes place. Both French and Bell (1999) and Cummings and Worley (1997) discuss the need for the parallel structure to be broadly representative of the organisation, representing a microcosm of its levels, functions and groupings. Parallel structures are described at their most simple level as consisting of a steering group and probably some working groups. In parallel structures the members are engaged in problem solving without going through the usual hierarchical channels (Cummings and Worley 1997). One of the key features of the parallel structure highlighted by French and Bell (1999) is that it must create a space and culture within it where people think and act differently than they do in the formal system. “Parallel structures need to help people break free of the normal constraints imposed by the organisation, engage in genuine inquiry and experimentation and initiate needed changes” (French and Bell 1999). An action research process is the general approach taken to work in the parallel structure with the group working through the cycle of diagnosis, planning, action and evaluation (Cummings and Worley 1997, French and Bell 1999). Cummings and Worley cite research by Zand demonstrating that through participation in parallel structures members of organisations learnt more innovative approaches and used new methods of solving difficult problems. The research is not conclusive and other data suggests that if parallel structures are not integrated with the formal organisation such benefits will not accrue and that the opposite could be the case (Neumann 1989). “Parallel structures are often the best way to initiate change in large bureaucratic
organisations, especially when the change involves a fundamental shift in the organisations methods of work and/or culture” (French and Bell 1999).

2.9 Theory of permeability of system boundaries as it applies the present research

Alderfer (1980) outlines a theory of over and underbounded systems. He outlines that all systems have boundaries and that permeability of those boundaries is a key element of these boundaries. To operate to maximum effectiveness an optimum degree of permeability exists for each system in relation to its environment. An overbounded system is one which has a less than optimal degree of permeability and an underbounded system has a greater degree of permeability than is desirable. The effects are described in basic terms by Alderfer (1980). “The primary threat to underbounded systems is that they will become totally caught up in their environmental turbulence and lose a consistent sense of their own identity and coherence” (Alderfer:269). “The primary threat to overbounded systems is they become closed off to their environments and lose the capacity to respond adaptively to environmental changes and to reverse the build up of entropy” (Alderfer:269). Alderfer views a state of extreme underboundedness as a greater threat to an organisation than overboundedness. As boundary permeability is difficult to assess and measure, Alderfer identified a number of indicators which may be used to determine whether a system departs from optimal boundary permeability and in which direction.

The indicators are: - goals, authority relations, economic conditions, role definitions, communication patterns and human energy (Alderfer:269). This theory provides a
useful framework for analysing systems, providing insights to dynamics occurring and possible interventions appropriate to them. In the context of this study, Alderfer’s framework was used during the process as a tool, to aid understanding of the system and specific patterns and dynamics taking place.
3.0 Methodology

The current research is based on the analysis of the development of a needs analysis process in an Irish Health Board and data from a series of semi-structured interviews with top and senior management. The research was designed to address the following questions:

1. In a time of organisation change how does the process for developing a training needs analysis tool influence organisational change?
2. How can a training needs analysis process help get people on board with the organisational change?

In order to address these questions, it was necessary to look in detail at the actual process of developing a training needs analysis for this organisation. By doing this the dynamics of the process and issues and changes arising could be followed and explored. In order to achieve this, an action research case study approach was taken in the first instance and a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with top and senior management of the organisation. The researcher was an insider researcher, holding a senior position in the organisation and taking a change agent role.

The traditional cyclical action research process was followed during the process (Kolb and Frohman 1970). Specifically, the elements were diagnosis, planning, taking action, evaluating, further planning, action, evaluation and so on.
3.1 The participants

Two distinct services, located in different counties and representing different programme areas of the organisation took part in the study. One was a Mental Health service with approximately 380 staff and the other a Community Services programme with approximately 240 staff. Each programme has a wide range of different staff grades, although the diversity of functions would be greater in Community Services. These two sites were self selected following a change initiative, which had taken place previously in the organisation. All staff were invited to put forward change ideas through an ideas questionnaire. In the process that followed, 22 change projects were identified and “undertaking a training needs analysis”, which had been put forward by the both sites, was number 10 on that list.

Upon appointment to the organisation the researcher agreed to lead the project, with a view to developing a system that could be rolled out across the whole organisation following initial development and testing with the two sites. A change facilitator was also assigned to the project. A group of change facilitators had been selected and developed from within the organisation as part of the original change initiative mentioned above, and act as a resource to projects.

As a first step in the process, a parallel learning structure was put in place with the establishment of a steering group. A steering group of twelve was set up in such a way as to try to represent a cross section or microcosm of the overall organisation. The steering group included two representatives from each site who were selected by them. In particular, the researcher requested that site representatives be selected to reflect a diversity of staff backgrounds. It proved very difficult to get a representative
from support staff, a group which would include porters, domestic staff and care attendants. This group has been traditionally under-represented and have lower participation rates in training. Representation from this group was not achieved until half way through the process. The steering group met eight times in all.

3.2 The process

Following initial entry and contracting with the two sites and the steering group the process worked through the stages of diagnosis, planning, action and evaluation. This was in fact an iterative process with multiple cycles occurring, though for simplicity it will be reported as one overall cycle. The process was tracked over a period from February 2002 to end of January 2003. Though the data was being collected with reflection and journaling from the start, the process was not discussed as action research specifically with the group until September 2002. This was related to the development of the researchers’ knowledge and understanding around the action research process. However, the group was aware of a research agenda from the outset. Throughout the process the following data was collected:

- Minutes were taken of each meeting which were circulated and formally reviewed and agreed at the following meeting.
- Detailed notes were taken of each meeting by a note taker who noted full details of what was discussed, the dynamics and atmosphere in the meeting.
- The researcher maintained notes from the meeting, which in addition to content also noted observations around dynamics, behaviours and patterns.
- The researcher also maintained a reflection diary, where thoughts and reflections on the process were recorded, analysed and reviewed.
• Notes were maintained of all contacts relevant to the process with the sites and steering group members.

• Reflections on the dynamics of the meetings and issues arising were reflected back to the group at meetings and discussed. This was done more formally from September 2002 but had in fact occurred already in the three meetings that had been held to that point.

• Full records were maintained of all group activities and flipchart work.

• Focus groups were held at each pilot site as part of the diagnostic phase. These were facilitated and addressed a small number of key questions. The raw data from the focus groups was analysed by the steering group and was fed back to the attendees. Further feedback was also sent to the focus group attendees regarding the progress of the project in relation to the issues they had raised.

• Throughout the project the change facilitator worked with the researcher on the project.

• The Director of Organisational Development in the organisation consulted to the process as requested and provided additional reflection space, challenge and insight into the organisation and its dynamics to both the group and the researcher. For the researcher this offered a second view to verify or challenge researcher interpretation of dynamics in the process.

• Following the piloting of the process developed an evaluation was conducted which focused on the process and the tools used. The evaluation was developed collaboratively with the group and the data was analysed in an evaluative inquiry approach. The learning of the steering group was also distilled in this process.
An evaluation report was written and circulated to all members of the steering group for comment, amendment and agreement. The report was written along the lines of the cycle of planned change to reflect the process that had been worked through and to model the process for the organisation. No material changes to the report were made by the group.

3.3 The interviews

Following the development of the needs analysis process a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with top and senior management to ascertain their views about the benefits or affects they would expect to see from the process, the level of participation and role they would like in the process, who they see as having a role, their views regarding implementation and its contribution if any to overall change in the organisation. See appendix 1 for a copy of the interview schedule.

The top layers of the organisation were targeted for the interviews with an emphasis on those responsible for services and with responsibility for large numbers of employees. Directors of the main functions such as Finance, HR, IT and OD were also targeted. A total of 18 top and senior managers were invited to participate in the interviews. The option of face to face or telephone interview was offered to enhance the possibility of securing interviews with this group. Sixteen responded to the request and of that number a total of 13 were interviewed, twelve face to face and one by telephone as the individual had been called to another site. The other interviews did not happen for a variety of reasons such as illness, leave and urgent matters which clashed with appointment times. Those interviewed included the CEO, Regional Managers, Directors of Functions and General Managers.
Each interview lasted approximately an hour and was recorded in note form as close to verbatim as possible. Tape recording was not used as it was considered that the majority of the target group would not be as comfortable with tape recording and that a better result might be achieved without it. The interviews were typed up in detail shortly after each interview by the researcher.

3.4 Preparation and analysis of data

The data collected during the development and piloting of the needs analysis process as detailed above was transferred to a time ordered matrix (Miles and Huberman 1994). The matrix recorded the time frame, people involved, the activity in relation to the process, the stage in the cycle of planned change, other external events impacting on the process and comments. Information was condensed as much as possible but left with enough richness to convey the detail of what happened and any issues arising. Specific quotes were included where appropriate and reflection notes.

The prepared data was then colour coded for elements relating the four key organisational change areas listed earlier. The data was further colour coded for resistance. Forms of resistance were categorised as follows:

- Dependency
- Fight/flight
- Fragmentation
- Identity
- Authority
- Urgency/ Quick fix
These forms of resistance relate to characteristics of bureaucratic, hierarchical public service organisations noted in the literature and are also recurring organisational issues as diagnosed by the Director of OD in the organisation.

This data was further analysed and reduced to a one page summary depicting the change issues and organisational issues arising at each stage of the cycle of planned change. Thus it is possible to look at whether the key organisational change issues arose during the development of the needs analysis process and also what kinds of dynamics were happening during the process with each site and with the steering group overall. This latter data is useful as it highlights organisational issues which will have to be planned for and worked into any future implementation of this process and future organisational change work.

The data from the interviews was prepared so that all the data relating to each question was put together. The data was then analysed for main themes and ideas emerging. These were extracted and then further analysed and clustered to reduce the data to overall themes emerging. The data as a whole was then reviewed for overall and recurrent themes. The data was also colour coded in relation to the key organisational change issues identified.
3.5 Research Design

An action research approach was selected for this research as it is acknowledged in the literature as a common organisational approach to organisational change. In the research context, action research allows collaborative problem solving with those involved and the generation of new knowledge (Coghlan and Brannick 2001). It allows the study of a process directly as it unfolds. Gummesson (2000:51) considers that the “roles of change agent and senior executive provide the most comprehensive access to strategic and organisational issues…(and that)…participation in the chain of events gives the researcher privileged access that will facilitate both the development of theory and practice”. Gummesson (2000) considers that the level of pre-understanding and access to the reality of any process balances against concerns around objectivity. In the context of this research, the researcher was relatively new to the organisation (5 months) at the time the process commenced. The advantages of access and the development of some pre-understanding (and continuing development of same), were balanced against not being completely socialised to the culture over many years, and still having an element of an outsider view.

Semi structured interviews were selected as a data collection method to achieve a balance between a structure allowing the same questions to be asked yet allowing for flexibility of response and the following of particular points with interviewees (CLMS Research Methods and Dissertation Requirements).
4.0 Results

In this study the aim was to examine how the process for developing a training needs analysis tool could influence organisation change. In addition consideration was given to how the training needs analysis process can help get people on board with organisational change. This was all set against a backdrop of ongoing organisational change occurring as a result of both internal and external factors.

The main result of the process was that through adopting an action research approach to the development of the process the researcher was able to learn about the organisation, the enablers and blockers to change and what needs to be built into future interventions. Through use of the parallel structure, which mirrored very much the overall organisation, how people resisted or bought into the change could be observed and considered. The process was quite different for the two sites and there were different outcomes for each. This is particularly interesting as the organisation is in transition as outlined earlier and this transition was reflected in the two sites. As a result of going through this process a tool was developed for identifying learning and development needs that reflects organisational thinking and needs. Insights have also been gained which will be built into future developments in the area of learning and development in the organisation. The development of the training needs analysis tool through the parallel structure and the evaluative inquiry approach to the evaluation of the process modelled reflective practice for the organisation and provides an opportunity for it to look at itself through reflecting it back to itself. It also
modelled and addressed the key organisational change issues of participation, strategic focus, learning organisation culture and collaboration.

The results will be reported in the format of a case study. The case study will be reported chronologically and divided into the stages of the cycle of planned change. The results of the interviews will be reported in a separate chapter.
4.1 Entry and contracting

This stage of the cycle was about starting the work with the two pilot sites and contracting what the work was to be about. This took place between December 2001 and February 2002.

Contact was made with the manager at each site and an appointment sought to meet with the manager and management team at each site.

The purpose of the meeting was to explore expectations, determine what each site was hoping for when they selected Training Needs Analysis as a change project, establish local expertise in the area and clarify roles and responsibilities. At the start of the meeting the change facilitator and researcher gave a brief introduction, covering the background to the project, the wider context, current TNA practice in other agencies, the scope of training and the composition of the steering group. A broad definition of training and development was outlined for the project to go beyond just courses and include areas such as on the job training, rotation, shadowing, mentoring, workshops, study, e-learning.

Meeting with Site A

The manager and members of the local management team were present. A lot of issues specific to the organisation of training courses and attendance at training courses were raised initially. Key areas identified by the team in relation to TNA included:

- Would like training tied to service needs and service planning.
- Would like training to be locally appropriate and accessible.
- Need a system of prioritising.
- Need to ensure equity.
- Need a coordinated system of courses to meet local needs.
- Need a decision making process.
- Need to be proactive.
- Need a practical solution and to avoid more red tape.

*Initially it was hard for this group to focus on training needs analysis as they were distracted with general issues around training. There was a strong element of dependency also in that everything was about what others should do, whereas a large number of the issues were within their remit to control and change. With facilitation the group engaged with the task and the eventual outcome of the meeting was very productive.*

**Meeting with Site B**

This site chose that the initial meeting should be with members of the local training and development group. The change facilitator and researcher met with the Chair and three other members of a local training and development group. The group had used staff questionnaires in the past to establish training needs for their area and approximately one third of staff had responded. The local training and development group had identified priority areas and organised training to address these. The main question for this group in the current project was “how do you know what are the priority training needs for the organisation?”
It was difficult to engage with this site from the start. Many unsuccessful attempts were made to engage with the Manager and the situation was resolved when we met at an organisational event. He decided that he wished to route the process through his training and development group who dealt with these issues as line managers did not have the time to take on board training. Several attempts were made to engage this group and were cancelled but eventually four members were met. This group had been planning to go their own route around training needs analysis and were investigating companies to do the work. Issues around authority and identity arose here.

Establishment of steering group

Further to the meetings with the pilot sites the following decisions were taken:

- A steering group should be established as described earlier in the methodology section.
- The principles of the learning organisation were to underpin the work.
- The focus would be on developing a process and not on task.
- Any approach taken should be multidisciplinary.
- The focus in developing a needs analysis process would be on a broad range of development opportunities and not just on determining courses.
- Change facilitators would be made available as necessary during the project.
- The aim would be to develop a proactive and devolved process.
- Looking for a pathway or process to identify needs and aid in decision-making, selection of options and sharing of information.
- Organisational issues to be considered in the work of the group and an approach taken to model how we would hope the organisation might work.
4.2 Diagnosis

The diagnostic process really started with the establishment of the steering group and exploration of the area with them. The first meeting of the steering group took place in February 2002. A number of key discussions and decisions took place at the initial meeting, many of which would resurface throughout the process.

1. The background and rationale of the project was outlined as above.
2. The current training needs analysis project was put in context outlining what is going both within and outside the organisation including the new Health Strategy, ‘Quality and Fairness – A Health System for All’.
3. The rationale of the membership of the group was outlined as above.
4. Discussion took place on the importance of focussing on the “process” rather than the “task” and it was stressed that the aim of the group should be on the “how” rather than the “what” of identifying and analysing training needs.
5. It was decided to change the name of the project from “Training Needs Analysis” to “Learning & Development Needs Analysis” to reflect the broader remit of the project and to broaden the focus from just training courses.
6. It was acknowledged that ownership of training is a key element in its success in terms of decision making. To make any analysis process successful it was deemed essential to have management buy-in at all levels.
7. The issue of training needing to be part of a manpower plan was considered crucial. This concept would arise many times especially in relation to service planning.
8. The group identified ground rules for its operation, including a quorum of eight for attendance at meetings. It was also agreed that the work of the group should model how we would like to see the organisation working.

9. The group explored the Principles of a Learning Organisation and also explored what was working and not working in the organisation in relation to learning and development. In other words, an attempt to find a shared vision for the group. This task proved difficult for the group and was a theme which we revisited many times during the course of the process. There was general agreement on what was working well including:

- Staff can voice their training needs.
- There is an expanding range of degree and diploma courses available locally.
- Some studies have already been conducted on training needs analysis.
- There are more training personnel
- Multi-disciplinary, multi-level and multi-site training initiatives have already been started.
- Some personal development planning is taking place.
- Learning sets have taken place.
- Accreditation / quality initiatives are underway.
- Greater awareness of the importance of lifelong learning.
- Greater expectations that one’s learning needs will be met.
- Demand that training be more co-ordinated and strategically managed.
What was not working well included:

- Inequality of access to courses.
- Ad hoc decisions in terms of selection, approval, planning release and access to courses.
- Lack of planning at every level, including strategic HR.
- Lack of reflective practice and evaluation.
- Lack of central, comprehensive database of training.
- Lack of statistics on county, department, sector and profiles of staff availing of training.
- Lack of consumer validation.

10. The role of the steering group was examined and terms of reference agreed.

- To develop a system for learning and development needs analysis which is holistic and includes a data collection process, a method for analysis and prioritisation, and which outlines a structure.
- To document a pathway for the process.
- To conduct a pilot of the process in Site A and Site B, and possibly within a section or department of the organisation’s largest site (Site C - representing the other main service area of the organisation).
- To analyse and evaluate the pilot.
- To plan and implement the process.
11. Wider organisational issues and their implications for the organisation developing as a learning organisation, and for the development of the process were considered and discussed. These issues included fragmentation, urgency, dependency, leadership, identity, power, competence, inclusion and exclusion. All are relevant to the group and need to be revisited as the group undertakes its task. For example, it was decided that it was important for the group to model what it would like the organisation to do in relation to learning and development and consequently this was adopted as one of the ground rules of the group. It was also decided that it was crucial for the group to focus on the important rather than the urgent, foster independence instead of dependence, identify needs within the group and therefore increase identity and so on. Value for money was also seen as critical.

12. The next step identified was to carry out consultations with the two pilot sites to discover what was working well, not working well and improvements needed and to feed this information into the process. In Site A, 15 Heads of Department and one other staff member from each department were invited to attend a two hour session in March to explore these questions. In Site B, a similar format was envisaged including Partnership and Unions. Change facilitators were made available to both sites. At this stage it was intended to pilot a process in June and have a process available for use by September 2002.

There was a high level of energy and enthusiasm, engagement and energy at this first meeting. However focussing on process rather than task was difficult for some. There was a strong valence to make quick decisions and assumptions and jump
straight into the task. This may be summed up in a quote from one participant towards the end of the day “oh yeah, that’s task again, need to focus on the process”.

Consultations with pilot sites
At the consultations people were divided into small groups, each of which was facilitated. The facilitators role was to keep groups focussed and prevent them straying from the specific areas they were to address and to encourage and facilitate participation from all. During the consultations one or two of the facilitators had difficulty staying in facilitator role and not participating themselves. The questions asked during the focus groups were:

1. What is working well in identifying learning and development needs?
2. What is not working well in identifying learning and development needs?
3. In reflecting on the items you have listed with regard to what is not working well, what needs to happen to move us towards becoming a learning organisation?

Focus group with Site A
Twenty-one managers and staff attended the session in Site A. The main themes which emerged were:

- A desire to take responsibility for training locally. This included using local expertise, delivering training locally and for local management to have a role in training.
• To have a process or system for identifying training needs and determining how training contributes to the overall vision of the services. They wanted an agreed, proactive, bottom-up, inclusive approach linked to service planning.
• A coordinated approach to training with a clear structure for learning and flow of information all the way from service user to top management and back. They indicated that there is no agreed approach, no shared database and no clearly identified structures.
• Support for innovation. A learning organisation culture was not felt to be evident.
• Management support for the process and training in general. The group felt that there was a fear of change and resistance to it and a lack of interest in training. They queried whether training is valued by the organisation.

The local steering group representatives made all the arrangements for this consultation themselves. Authority issues arose here where at the last minute a senior staff member tried to cancel the event, saying it had not been properly discussed at the local management team and was premature, local union officials were contacted also. The issue was resolved by local management and the event happened as planned.

Focus group with Site B

Thirty-two managers and staff attended the session in Site B. The main themes which emerged were:

• Equity of access to training and funding for training.
• Sharing of experiences within the organisation and with other similar organisations, and a mechanism for the feedback of learning from attendance at courses.

• The linking of learning and development to organisational goals through assessment of service and staff needs.

• Clarity of structures around training, for example local and corporate and who does what.

• Development of local training structures and the hiring of a local training officer. Provision of courses locally.

• A mechanism for identifying individual needs and the development of a training plan for every department.

• They did not feel listened to about training and want an opportunity to request specific courses. They feel people should choose courses rather than being nominated by their manager to attend.

• A number of other issues were mentioned however they were not to do with assessment of training needs. A major theme was the provision of locums and provision of study leave. There was a view that locums should be provided for any staff member attending a course and that no one should have to return to their days work on the desk.

Authority/dependency issues arose here as this group decided that they did not wish to invite their own site to the focus groups and requested that the researcher in management role would write the letter of invitation, “the chair felt it would be better coming from you”. This focus group had to be cancelled and rescheduled as there were insufficient people to attend. The focus group eventually was well attended and
there was good participation although there was a strong agenda to bring up other issues unrelated to the purpose of the meeting. In addition, a strong need to validate the local training and development group was picked up by the change facilitator and researcher.
4.3 Planning

The planning stage of the project covered a number of elements.

1. **Determining which approach to take.** Initially a range of approaches used in other agencies and outlined in the literature were under consideration. Early on however, it came to the attention of the group that the Office for Health Management (a government organisation established to improve and develop management in the Health Services) had commissioned the development of a Learning and Development Needs Identification Toolkit. This Toolkit covered identification of learning and development needs at corporate, service, department/unit and individual levels. A number of tools for collection of data at each level were outlined. Initially it was decided to take a closer look at the line manager level and determine whether it might be suitable for our purposes. The Toolkit was discussed in depth at the second steering group meeting. This second meeting was a difficult one, for a number of reasons, not least of which was the amount of work involved during the day. The full impact of the size of this project and the amount of work was beginning to be felt. There was some concern expressed by one site at the use of SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis, as it was felt they had already used this technique in 1996. Overall the consensus was that the OHM Toolkit seemed to fit conceptually with what the group was hoping to achieve and more importantly, provided an approach that could address many of the issues raised during the consultation process at each site.

2. **Determining the supports needed.** Initially it was thought that workshops for line managers would be needed and our change facilitator planned to meet
1 process in their area. The two representatives from this site decided that they would be able to undertake the necessary work on their own. Site B decided to pursue matters alone and indicated that the process as outlined would not suit them. It was decided that additional learning could be drawn from one site proceeding ahead of the other, in that learning about what worked or did not could be gathered and a modified approach adopted as necessary.

3. **Communication with unions.** It was decided that a letter would be sent to each of the unions represented in the organisation informing them of the project and inviting any comment. One union responded and indicated that they had no difficulty with the project and wished the group well with its work. No other unions responded.

4. **Planning the pilots. Timeframe - Site A.** The plan was to hold the first service planning meeting on 15 May 2002 at the Heads of Department meeting. At a service level this would involve a review of the last year,

---

1 Service planning was introduced into the Irish Health services with the Health Amendment Act (No.3) (1996). A service plan is a high level document produced by the Health Boards, which outlines the range of services to be provided within the allocated resources as notified for the year to which the plan relates. It is a contract between the Department of Health and Children and the Health Board and is the link between the Board’s strategic and operational plans. In the last eighteen months Boards have been directed to adopt a more consultative approach bringing all staff into the process of developing the plan.
introduction of the concept of SWOT analysis to the group and feedback about the learning and development needs analysis process and work to date.

The next stage, by mid-June, was for each sector / department to do its own SWOT for the service plan and bring this information back to the larger service planning meeting. This would allow for continuous feedback, the introduction of the Toolkit, a discussion on the implications of it and would ensure that work had been done at two levels, both service and department levels.

The final stage, by September 2002, was that the service plan and associated learning and development needs analysis would be brought to the Corporate Management Team.

**Timeframe – Site B.** The plan in Site B was that the Management team would do a service level SWOT at their meeting on June 6, 2002. They would then examine the learning and development needs from the SWOT.

The next stage in September was that the line managers would do a SWOT and identify learning and development needs with their own teams, feed this back up to the management team, then up to the training and development group and then to the Regional Managers.

A lot of issues arose for the steering group at its second meeting as mentioned above. There was significant resistance during the meeting in various forms. Dependency was one of the first in the form of avoidance of the work and focus on a
list of organisational ‘shoulds’ that were preventing our work or would make it pointless. Also time spent arguing that a company should do this and not us. Some group members were stuck on their own agendas and there was a lot of fragmentation of effort. There were also fight/flight reactions “we are not doing that OHM stuff”, “we did SWOT 5 years ago…that would be going backwards”. No alternatives or possible approaches were suggested by group members. There were also authority issues in that representatives from one site said they could not do anything without their Manager or Chair of their local group. The whole meeting was very flat with no energy and huge difficulty sticking to the process. For the researcher and the change facilitator it was hugely hard work and a struggle. Following that meeting similar fight/flight, identity, fragmentation, authority and dependency issues arose in contacts with Site B around the process and related matters. The same pattern repeated in a number of different contacts despite the researchers efforts to reflect and problem solve around how to engage with the site, value and acknowledge their work, learn from what had worked for them, and give them their own space. At the following steering group meeting the researcher reflected on what had happened at the last meeting and named the issues. Discussion took place about how the group was mirroring the wider organisation and what needed to be built into the process to reduce these issues. There was almost a sense of relief in the group that the issues had been raised, silence initially then comments “I am glad you said that as I was confused”, “need to stick to the process, got caught on side issues”. Distractions occurred during this next meeting but the group regulated itself and brought itself back on track. Some dependency and fragmentation issues arose.
4.4 Action

In May 2002 significant funding issues arose for the organisation which changed planning circumstances. The June 2002 meeting was cancelled due to a number of factors: the lack of a quorum, a World Cup soccer match and time required to plan for the changed overall organisational situation.

As the energy and enthusiasm of the group seemed to be waning at this stage, it was decided that the Director of OD, Corporate Learning and Development Manager and change facilitator would meet to refocus the project for September.

A pattern had emerged of fight/flight, fragmentation, authority, identity and dependency issues with Site B in particular and also in the steering group. One of the representatives from Site B resigned from the group because they had moved jobs. Much effort went into trying to get a replacement for this person. It was difficult to get engagement with the site around this. The continuing organisational crisis was a significant factor as all energies were diverted to addressing the situation and releasing staff and travel expenses to attend meetings was a major concern. In addition the researcher was told that the training and development group was to be disbanded by the site, this did not in fact occur in the end. The mood in the organisation was negative and the level of control from head quarters had increased significantly.

Engagement had become a major issue and was unpicked a bit further. A number of possible reasons were considered in relation to Site B; fear of loss of control, fear the T&D group work would no longer be perceived as valuable, fear of redundancy if line
managers take up role more fully re training, fear of more work. It was decided that it would be important to try to involve this site more in the design of how the process would work and an intervention was planned for the next meeting.

The work of Alderfer (1980) around boundary permeability in systems proved useful in making sense of what was occurring also. The researcher diagnosed the system with regard to learning and development in the organisation as primarily underbounded. The Director of OD also diagnosed the system and concurred with this view. This yielded further insights for moving forward.

The September meeting was an important one as there had not been any meeting since May and it was opportunity for the group to reassess its progress. Feedback from the pilot sites was critical at this stage. A number of issues arose:

- The Site B representatives were not available to attend the meeting. The steering group were unsure as to how the pilot was progressing at Site B.
- The budget crisis meant that many things were put “on hold” with the result that Site A’s SWOT analysis was now to take place at the end of September as part of the service planning process. It was felt that line managers were still committed and interested in the project and familiar with it.
- Briefing meetings were held with the relevant regional managers who both endorsed the project and reiterated that they would not like to see a wish list and wanted a “bottom-up” approach with an emphasis on development rather than training.
• There was an agreement that there was a need for the pilots to be completed in 2002 so that the process could be rolled out in 2003.

• There was still a possibility that a part of Site C could be used as a pilot site.

• The pilots were throwing up broader issues such as funding, fragmentation, etc, which can often divert from the real issues.

• The group agreed to continue with the plan with the two pilot sites, to use the OHM Toolkit and to evaluate it.

• A Service Planning Handbook had been produced in the organisation and found to be very useful. It was decided that a Learning and Development Needs Analysis Handbook tailored to the organisation would be useful. This was to be drawn up as a template and circulated to a small number of colleagues to gauge reaction and feedback. All groups contacted felt the Handbook and edited Toolkit were useful and relevant.

Reflection took place in the group around what was going on in the wider organisation and with the sites. The current organisational difficulties were acknowledged but there was strong commitment to proceed with the groups work and that it may be more important than ever to have learning and development needs analysis process. Organisational issues arising were urgency (a sudden rush to roll out the process immediately without completing the pilots) and fragmentation (during the early part of the meeting a lot of other issues were thrown on the table). Problem solving around how the process would work and the pathway for the needs analysis proved very difficult and the group struggled with this. However a shift occurred in the group and it became more process focussed and organisational issues were not
used as a barrier, there was a good sense of energy and engagement. One participant said at the end of the day that they felt an “awakening today – coming to light”.

The October 2002 meeting was very poorly attended. Nevertheless, it was decided to proceed as much had been achieved and postponing another meeting would only drag the process on further. Again, feedback was available from Site A only. This Site reported that the learning and development needs analysis process was being fully integrated into the service planning process for the year. Although change facilitators were available to support Site A they were not needed. The two members of the steering group were offering support themselves to the line managers. This support varied from a telephone call to actually working with a manager and their team to conduct a SWOT analysis. This was scheduled to be completed by the end of October. The Handbook and template were finalised. The fact that there was a time lag in completing the Handbook and template meant that the pilot sites had used the original, unedited version of the Toolkit.

Reflection took place at this meeting also around engagement with the other pilot site and the system as a whole. For the researcher there was sense of a shift from focussing on this as learning and development needs analysis project to a change management project. It was becoming much more about learning how to effect change in the organisation. The group reflected that at this point instead of modelling how the organisation should work we were modelling how the organisation is working. We wondered whether group members were clear how to take up their roles in the group and whether some might perceive the task to be completed. We
decided to write to those not present and highlight what had been achieved, the work remaining and their specific role and contribution to that. A flow chart of work completed and the remaining steps was developed and circulated to the whole group. A similar document with a short memo was also sent to Regional Managers to update them on the project. The group found it encouraging to see all that had been achieved and it provided some motivation to see so few steps remaining.

The completion of the needs analysis process
An important element of the model developed was the coordination of the learning and development needs and determination of which elements should be developed locally in each service and which required a corporate response. In addition coordination was required between a number of different groups in the organisation providing training in specific areas and the corporate HR learning and development function. In January a sub-group of the steering group met comprising site representatives and those involved in learning and development met to analyse the service level learning and development plans and agree priorities and actions. A significant amount of the needs identified could be addressed locally, using local resources and expertise.
4.5 Evaluation

In November the group started working on the evaluation in earnest. It was decided that the focus of the evaluation should be on the tools and the process. After lengthy discussion a questionnaire methodology was chosen as most suitable and it was agreed to survey management team members from each site. The overall aim was to determine what worked and what did not so that the process could be further developed and improved before further implementation in the organisation. Expert advice was sought on the questionnaire from within the organisation and the format of the evaluation questionnaire was agreed in December. The questionnaires were distributed in December for return in January 2003. See appendix III for a copy of the questionnaire.

At the November meeting there was feedback and reflection from the last meeting as usual. The researcher attempted to engage the group around the data on underbounded systems and its implications but there was no real interest in this. The Manager from Site B attended the meeting as their second representative. A lot of fragmentation, fight/flight and authority issues came up, mostly from one particular member who was very angry. On reflection this may have been connected to other strategic developments occurring. There was also resistance from Site B around engaging their managers in work around the learning and development needs analysis. This site had completed their service plan some time ago and the needs analysis was perceived as extra work. It was difficult to agree around the evaluation with protracted debate and repeated revisiting of points. There was a lot of distraction into side issues. There were also authority issues around who could
advise on and conduct research and challenges to collaborative work between departments. One member did not participate at all.

Fight/flight, fragmentation and dependency issues continued at the start of the next meeting. Many barriers were put forward to conducting the evaluation such as time, who would analyse, who would write up, no one would participate. Afterwards one member indicated that their site had only done the needs analysis in the end because they were told to so the evaluation would be very negative.

The evaluation data was pulled together and initial analysis presented to the final meeting of the steering group in January. Together the group analysed and interpreted the data and distilled key learning and recommendations for the process going forward.

This meeting was a very engaged and positive one. The group started with reflection on individual learning from the process. Only very summary top line analysis was presented to the group at the start so the whole group was very actively engaged in the analysis and interpretation of the data. In this format issues and difficulties that arose were able to be talked about and learnt from without defensiveness. There was a strong sense both of learning from the process and of satisfaction at having completed the task the group had set itself.
Learning for the steering group

- Initially the project to develop a learning and development needs analysis process was seen to be a service issue but as the process unfolded it became clear it was a more complex organisation wide issue.
- The process was also viewed as just about developing a training needs analysis initially but unfolded as a change process.
- It became clear to the group that different areas of the organisation operate differently and therefore there needs to be a degree of customisation while maintaining a core level of standardisation.
- The importance of very thorough diagnosis and identification of issues, agendas and expectations of different stakeholders was very apparent.
- The skills of all group members were not fully utilised in the process.
- It is important to have the right mix of stakeholders on the steering group from the start and to plan about transitions and continuity where members had to move out of the group.
- It is important to personalise and identify individual benefits from participation in the group for people.
- The project required a longer time frame than initially anticipated, identifying this and identifying the process as a longer project may help commitment.
- Further definition of structures by having a steering group and local sub-groups on each site would have been useful.
- There were too many competing things going on in the organisation at the same time.
- A lot of involvement, communication and ongoing connection is required.
• The strength of this process will be its links with service planning and performance indicators.

Findings from the evaluation questionnaire
The findings from the two main sites indicated a difference in experience of the process at the two sites. There were differences in the actual processes, sequence of events and structures at the two sites. Overall, members from Site A viewed the experience and process more positively than those from Site B.

Findings common to Site A and Site B
The findings that were common to both sites are outlined below. The overall findings were as follows:
• The link to the service planning process was positive and productive.
• The use of a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis process was helpful.
• Staff involvement and team approach was positive
• Prioritisation – Helped to develop a plan linked to service priorities and to prioritise the training needed.
• Sites identified local resources and sources for training
• The process was thought provoking
• A personal development planning process needs to be in place also.
• Ensured emphasis and focus on learning and development

Findings from Site A only
• There was help and support available and meetings to inform people
The process offered a structured, coordinated approach to planning training
The documentation and templates were helpful
Some grades were not involved
Some people were not aware that help was available
The process needs to be started earlier in the year

Findings from Site B only

The process was time consuming
The site did not feel consulted, informed or supported in the process
The process was seen as duplication and timing was not right
There was confusion and people needed training
The documentation was not found to be helpful
There was no sense of ownership of the process for Site B
Concern was expressed that funding would not be available to realise the plans and that the process would therefore be pointless.

The group determined that a number of factors need to be considered which will influence the customisation of the process as it is implemented further in the organisation:

- How business is done in each location, including culture and attitudes to standardisation and the role of central headquarters.
- The level of experience of team working and decision-making.
- The amount that is happening in an area already and the locations “readiness” for the new process. The linkages in existence between different processes locally.
• The level of buy in on the ground, to include the source of the request to introduce the process and local agendas.

• The level of support available at the location and identification of stakeholders and structures already in place.

Organisational change issues

Analysis of the data and coding for organisational change issues shows that the four main issues – participation, learning organisation, strategic approach and collaboration – occurred throughout the process. Issues around participation in relation to involving people, taking a partnership approach and communication came up throughout the process but particularly during the entry and contracting, diagnosis and planning stages. Issues relating to a strategic approach arose more during the action and evaluation phases. Collaboration and team work also arose more during the action and evaluation phases, although in terms of the other part of this organisational change area, reduction in competitiveness, fragmentation and authority came up repeatedly during the process.
4.6  Findings from interviews with senior management

As stated earlier, 13 interviews were conducted with top and senior managers; this was a good representation of the highest levels of management in the organisation. Twelve interviews were conducted face to face and one was conducted by telephone as the interviewee had been called away urgently to another site and a further suitable date was not available within a reasonable time frame.

Key findings are as follows:

All interviewees said that changes to the current system of training needs analysis are needed. All indicated that there is no formalised approach, the situation is ad hoc and reactionary and that training is not necessarily linked to service or organisational needs. The need for a strategic approach was agreed.

All identified a role for themselves in the change initiative. There were a range of roles identified from directing, leading championing and driving to unravelling blockages to supporting having the tools. The need for sign off by the senior management team to give a mandate to proceed was also highlighted.

With regard to the benefits or affects of the new system for the organisation a number of core themes emerged. There was a general agreement that staff would be more empowered and as a result would be more able to cope with organisational changes, better skilled, able to provide a better service and have an increased sense of self worth and confidence. There was a belief that it might improve the image of the organisation and lead to less complaints and increased customer satisfaction. In
addition there was an expectation that staff would feel more pride in the organisation
and more valued by the organisation and that this would increase commitment and
encourage staff to take greater responsibility. Responsibility was highlighted on two
levels. The first being taking responsibility for one’s own development and to take
time to reflect on development needs. The second to take more responsibility around
decisions and that a system would make for better decisions around use of learning
and development monies and greater transparency and fairness.

In contrast to the views about increased transparency and fairness was a view that
the system might highlight inequities in the current system and upset the equilibrium
or balance of power in some areas. In addition there could be resistance from
groups that had done well under the previous arrangements and might fear that their
circumstances might change.

The more corporate approach was seen to have smaller groups be part of a wider
organisational process and also to help harness resources and needs thus increasing
value for money through wiser use of funds. In contrast there was also anxiety
around the potential demand for resources as a result of the process and increased
pressure to deliver. The issue of increased staff demands was contrasted in some
quarters with beliefs that training is a threat or sign of weakness and needing to shift
culture and thinking around this.

There was also a belief that the system might help to break down the hierarchy,
encourage team working and enhance relations with staff.
In terms of roles in the learning and development needs analysis process there was general agreement that everybody has a role. The process is not seen as the preserve of the training function or senior management. Many identified that they would have a number of different roles in the process depending on whether viewed from their senior management perspective, as a manager of their own teams, or from a personal point of view.

In relation to introducing the process to the organisation a number of key issues emerged. More support, buy in and endorsement by the senior management team was highlighted. Support and commitment from all levels of management was also highlighted. A strong communication strategy to bring people on board, and sell the benefits to the organisation at large was also identified. The broader education of line managers was seen as key, to include not only education around the system but to help them to let go of control and empower people to make their own decisions around development. The linking of the process to service planning and with national and corporate strategy (which is being developed) was also seen as essential. Other areas highlighted for the successful implementation of the process were learning from previous experience and processes, putting in place plans and structures to support it, agreeing budgets, managing expectations, being prepared to give it time and reinforcing the new system by weighting in favour of needs identified through the system so that the old way does not continue to be effective.

Enablers to the process were identified as follows:

- Senior managers need to support, understand and champion the process to ensure general buy in.
• The link with service planning and the kind of participation and dialogue that has already started to take place within that process.

• The shift to people centred practice and values. Investment in learning and development and recognising that it is important to invest in people.

• The resources that the organisation has in terms of in house expertise generally and also OD and change facilitators.

• The Corporate Learning and Development department, the fact that there is a process and that it has been the subject of research and may therefore be seen as evidenced based. The process ongoing to get backing and support.

• Attitude change needed that we need to be very focussed around how learning and development resources are used, so the current challenges may be an enabler to more focussed thinking around training.

• Staff want to see fairness.

• Demands for high levels of service and legislation.

• A new breed of managers who are more interested in team based decision making.

The following challenges to introducing the process were identified:

• The new process could get lost in the current climate of budget issues, staff ceilings\(^2\) and the resulting difficulties in releasing staff to engage in processes or training, and the threats, worries and fears around the impending restructuring of the health services.

• Not a very supportive organisation or environment, a degree of ambivalence and not the level of understanding and support of top management that might be needed. There is also a level of line

---

\(^2\) Staff ceilings are absolute maximum numbers of whole time equivalent staff that the organisation may have.
management who are threatened by the development of those who work below them. The general level of negativity and apathy that can submerge the good things that are happening. A lot of sceptics.

- Human resources and central services generally seen as superfluous to requirements in the current climate. Covert opposition.

- Lack of attention to process and reflection space in the organisation. The learning and development needs analysis process is quite long and cumbersome and will take time to internalise and become unconscious. The underlying principles of the process are process driven and while that may be valued at one level it is not given sufficient attention.

- The reactive nature of the organisation. Everything is urgent and there is a constant sense of crisis management. The number of new directives and constant stream of changes and new demands and expectations. There is no chance to consolidate and staff are shell shocked, overwhelmed and overloaded.

- The size and complexity of the organisation and the subcultures inherent in it. The task is very big and getting to all the people and getting all the relevant people on board will be challenging.

- Staff expectations are very high and many expect that the organisation will deliver for them and do not see their own role in the process. Some will believe that they will lose out so selling to them will be a challenge. There may also be industrial relations issues arising from some being suspicious of the motives for the process.
In terms of linkages with other processes there was strong agreement around the link with the service planning process. In addition linkages with national and corporate strategy were identified and to the development of a more people centred approach and encouraging team work and reflective practice. A specific link with OD and quality in all change management projects was identified as work processes and services need to be looked at in conjunction with learning and development needs. It was seen as a two way process with other issues affecting the needs analysis process and being affected by it.

When asked about usual reactions to change initiatives all indicated a range of reactions depending on the change, the circumstances and how and when it is introduced. As well as positive and problem-solving, questioning responses a range of negative responses were identified also. Cynicism, resistance, caution, fear and irritation at yet another thing from headquarters were described. Some areas were described as very entrenched with a focus always on what is in it for me.

When asked specifically about the contribution, if any, interviewees would see the needs analysis making to overall organisational change there was a range of responses. There was a sense that the process might provide a framework to help identify priorities and should together with OD and service developments help develop the service further. In addition it might help to harness the huge pool of skills that our workforce has that may not always be given full expression in the work context. The following quotes give a flavour of the other impacts on organisational change discussed by the interviewees:
“if we approach the process in the way we want the organisation to work in the future it will model the way we want to do business. This is very important. If we want an open, participative, listening culture, to approach training needs in that way could be very powerful.”

“Imparting a view of culture to the organisation, can make a contribution but not automatic or completely inherent in the process, needs to be consciously built into the process.”

“If we get a culture of willingness to train does it not say they are willing to change. The start of a change process, willingness to change, no matter how small would be the start of a process would it not?”

“In broad terms, create a huge change, shift in culture, enable the organisation to achieve its organisational goals. If people get involved in training, start to gel across the service – impact on other thinking. If you change thinking you change behaviour.”

“Chipping away at the entrenched culture. Create commitment to organisational goals, local first – difficulty with HQ – big, bad brother. Commitment to HQ more aligned through this as people begin to see the connection between their own development and organisation development and strategy.”
Linkages between the development of the learning and development needs analysis process and organisational change.

The following table illustrates the linkages between the data generated/gathered during the action research process and interviews and the organisational change areas identified at the outset. This table shows some of the potential influences of the learning and development needs analysis process on these change issues and how the process may bring people on board.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Collaboration and Cooperation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Stakeholders were involved from the start, focus groups were held and feedback was provided.</td>
<td>• The coordinated, collaborative approach built into the end of the process re planning delivery following needs identification models collaboration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Space for all in the process, senior managers see a role for all, staff asked for in consultation, evaluation indicated staff were involved.</td>
<td>• Development of above element and pathway for the process by the steering group despite the struggle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• System facilitates team-based decision making re L&amp;D priorities.</td>
<td>• Evaluation process, steering group and interviewees see process as encouraging team work. Team approach seen as positive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clear connection between what staff requested in the consultation process and what the process enables.</td>
<td>• Process encouraged the acknowledgement and harnessing of internal skills and resources in learning and development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Senior management – smaller groups now part of wider organisational process.</td>
<td>• Through harnessing all needs and seeing as a whole greater value for money can be achieved and reduced duplication – as noted in interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Need for engagement of all acknowledged in steering group and by senior managers.</td>
<td>• Interviewee discussed ability to coordinate with other organisations once our needs known.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Senior management quotes re modelling how we want to do business in a participative way.</td>
<td>• The steering group modelled working across silos despite resistance at times to collaboration from parts of the system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Building on and reinforcing the participative process started recently with service planning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Approach</th>
<th>Learning Organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The linkage to the organisations service planning process – came up from pilot sites, evaluation, steering group and interviews.</td>
<td>• Process set in the context of learning organisation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The process helps achieve a more proactive, planned approach. This was highlighted in interviews and evaluation and steering group.</td>
<td>• Process modelled action research/learning process and dissemination of evaluation report in action research cycle format further models and reinforces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The prioritisation approach built in at service and corporate level encourages a strategic approach. People are exposed to links between L&amp;D and service needs.</td>
<td>• Evaluative inquiry approach involved steering group in learning and further modelled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Steering group learning that this was bigger than just a service issue but a complex organisation wide issue.</td>
<td>• People were exposed to a different way of working and to a reflection process and building on learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Steering group noting the fact that different parts of the organisation operate differently.</td>
<td>• Reported as “thought provoking” in the evaluation data. Senior managers commented that it would make people think, encourage reflection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interviewees seeing the process as helping people see the link between individual needs and organisational goals.</td>
<td>• Recognition by steering group and senior managers of the time required, as opposed to urgency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Linkages identified in interviews to national and organisational strategy, OD and service developments.</td>
<td>• Steering group and interviewees seeing learning and development needs analysis process as a change process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The need for senior management involvement and endorsement and the linking of the process to new developments.</td>
<td>• Requests for personal development planning from sites and senior managers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Line manager role acknowledged.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Process and the way it was conducted helped shift from concept of training administration function to corporate learning and development function.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Organisational change issues:

- **Participation** – this includes a move towards a people centred approach to both staff and service users, a participative management style, increased and improved communication and a partnership approach to work and developments.

- **Learning organisation culture** – shifting from a blame culture to one of learning from mistakes, reflective practice, trying new things, innovation and creativity, risk taking, an action learning/research approach to new projects. Encouraging individual responsibility and ownership around learning.

- **A strategic approach** to HR generally and in the context of this research to learning and development in particular. A shift from a reactive to a proactive approach and the encouragement and development of the line manager role in relation to people management and development.

- **Increased collaboration and cooperation** across the organisation with increased team work and a decrease in fragmentation and competitiveness.
5.0 Discussion and Conclusions

It is very clear from the process outlined above that organisational culture and change issues had a very large role to play in the development of a needs analysis process for the organisation. The development of a needs analysis process was a struggle and in the end the determination of the specific methodologies to use was the easiest part of the whole process. By far the most difficult element was dealing with and understanding the cultural and change issues arising. It is interesting to reflect as noted earlier that the bulk of the training needs analysis literature focuses on methodology and gives only passing reference to culture or change issues (Boydell and Leary 1996, McClelland 1993, Leat and Lovell 1997, Schneier et al 1988). This study concurs with the work of Holton et al., (2000) and Anderson (1994) who both viewed training needs analysis as an organisational change process.

Taking an action research approach to the development of the learning and development needs analysis process helped to highlight the significant impact the dynamics of hierarchy and the legacy of an autocratic, bureaucratic system has on the way a system operates and how people react to change and to participation in particular (Neumann 1989). The legacy of years of a blame culture and dependency were very evident throughout the process. While people identified changes needed, sometimes it was easier to decide that it was the anonymous organisations problem or for “management” to address rather than take steps to look for solutions. Similarly, the work of Alderfer (1980) proved useful in identifying that some of the
issues arising during the process may be related to an underbounded training system and a more underbounded site. In a hierarchical organisation it is difficult at first to think of underbounded systems, however the organisation is, as noted earlier, in transition and different conditions pertain in different parts. Through the action research process these issues came to the fore and the application of theory helped the understanding of what was happening and pointed the way to possible interventions. As Alderfer (1980) notes most OD interventions are designed for overbounded systems and quite different interventions are required for underbounded ones. Similarly by modelling and highlighting these issues the organisation may learn more about itself and the process of bringing people on board with change may be enhanced by understanding some of the dynamics better.

While it is difficult to attribute specific influence, particularly in the context of the many competing factors, there is no doubt that engaging in the development of a needs analysis process through an action research approach provided many insights into how to effect change in the organisation and the organisational dynamics that affect change. This learning will be applied to the implementation of this needs analysis process and is also available to others in the organisation. Reid and Barrington (1999) state that training is an important facilitator of organisational change, perhaps involving them in the development of the needs analysis process is a further facilitator of change as they learn to identify and deal specifically with the change issues arising rather than being the passive recipients of a fait a compli. Schein (1999:64) asserts that “you cannot understand a system until you try to change it”. Had the process not been conducted in this manner and for example, been owned by the learning and development function and imposed, no insights would have been
gained around why it might have worked better at one site than another. The approach also helped to signal the shift in the learning and development role from that of training administration to a more HRD role and reinforce what Anderson (1994) describes as the shift to a more ‘facilitator of change’ role. The linkage between the learning and development function and OD further underscored this shift (Grieves and Redman 1999). It was interesting to note however the resistance to this linkage and shift from various parts of the organisation. Perhaps the reaction is an indication of the influence on change in the area of collaboration that the process had. For some, collaboration is a threat.

The linkage of the needs analysis process to the service planning process in the organisation and the conduct of the two in tandem was one of the key success factors emerging from this process. This represents a major change for this organisation which has no history of a strategic approach to training or systematically linking it directly to the business of the organisation. As noted in Holton et al., (2000) study also, there was not a performance based culture in the public services. As one of the interviewees said “health is not into performance related anything”. This situation is changing overall, and this particular process may be a first step, from a learning and development point of view, to relate learning and development activities explicitly to the performance required of the organisation. In addition this process is one more step in moving training from a reactive to a proactive process and in modelling a proactive approach for the organisation. In this way the development of the process may be said to have influenced organisational change in terms of taking a strategic approach to training and has helped get people on board with this change.
The fact that the process developed encourages and in fact requires widespread participation and reinforces the participation already developed in the service planning process is an influencer of change in the area of participation. By encouraging people to become involved in such processes more staff are exposed to different ways of working and team approaches. Neumann (1989) described structural reasons, which included HR management, why people do not participate in organisational change. This process represents one HR process designed specifically to encourage participation.

The challenges involved in implementing a large scale learning and development needs analysis process are immense and this study has served to underscore this. Even without the challenges the organisation is currently facing, which are a threat to the very learning and development function, the task of dealing with the size, complexity and subcultures of the organisation is very challenging. With the exception of the Holton et al (2000) study there is little in the training needs analysis literature to offer advice and this still remains an area requiring further research.

This was a small scale case study and one must be cautious about claims made as a result. This research was conducted in one organisation and in just two of its many sites. Furthermore, the study has focussed on the initial stages of developing the needs analysis process. It was not possible, within the scope of this research, to follow the process further as it is implemented across the organisation. Future research looking at a number of organisations and tracking the process and dynamics over a longer period of time would help yield greater insights to the change processes occurring and issues arising. In addition, it would be interesting to include
both public and private sector organisations in future research. Determining causal relationships between specific events and change is difficult. Further research is required into the change aspects of training needs analysis and how it might better reflect the fuller HRD role of the training area. The literature points out that training needs analysis is often not undertaken in organisations (Wills 1998). Training needs analysis is described in the literature as part of the training process but in terms of other organisational activities it is not explicitly linked (Reid and Barrington 1999, Boydell and Leary 1996). Perhaps further research around methods or approaches which might integrate the training needs analysis process more fully with other organisational systems may be useful in encouraging organisations to see training needs analysis more favourably.

An underlying ambivalence is noted in this case where groups or individuals identify what needs to happen yet are difficult to engage in working on the issues, the benefits of needs analysis are highlighted by senior management yet there is not a definite vote of support, the need to develop staff to meet the challenges of our changing system is agreed yet it is suggested that HR is superfluous to requirements. The training or learning and development function is well documented as needing to prove itself and in the business literature investment in people is seen as a strategic advantage in this ever changing and competitive world (Walton 1999). The same kinds of business conditions do not apply in the public health sector and perhaps further research is needed from the specific point of view of health to make the strategic organisational benefits of a more strategic, participative approach to learning and development more explicit. Perhaps one of the roles the training function may usefully take up is to model learning and continuously reflect the
organisation back to itself, in this way it may play a useful part in helping develop a learning culture so that people can learn to learn and hence cope better with the ever changing environment.

The key learning points arising from this research may be summarised as follows:

1. The culture and change issues arising during the development of the learning and development needs analysis process were very significant.

2. The development and piloting of the needs analysis process needed to be approached as a change management process.

3. Linking the needs analysis process with existing organisational processes was a key factor in the success of the process. The specific link with the service planning process directly links learning and development to the business of the organisation and creates a strategic dimension.

4. In a large, complex organisation a balance must be struck between standardisation and customisation of the needs analysis process to allow for the different structures, subcultures and levels of readiness in the organisation.

In terms of the organisation described the parallel structure and action research approach delivered a learning and development needs analysis process that met most of the expressed expectations of the sites involved. As noted, the process has
the additional advantage of linking the needs analysis to required organisational performance. The need for a developmental, change management approach is highlighted. The process was a difficult one and the group struggled many times with difficult and complex issues. There was no quick fix solution but through perseverance the group achieved its stated goals and may feel justifiably proud of its achievement. No doubt the process will continue to evolve as we learn more through further testing the approach in other parts of the organisation.
6.0 References


CLMS (7) MSc in Training and Human Resource Management, Module 2.


7.0 Bibliography


Appendix (i) - Semi-structured interview schedule for top and senior managers

1. Do you think that changes to the current system of TNA are necessary?
2. What level of participation/role would you like to have in this change initiative?
3. What affects do you think this change will have on the people that work with you?
4. What implications do you think a TNA process will have for you and your area?
5. What do you think needs to happen to introduce this process successfully?
6. What do you see as the enablers to this process?
7. What challenges would you envisage in the implementation of a TNA process?
8. What benefits would you expect/hope to see in the implementation of a TNA process?
9. Who do you think has a role in the process?
10. How would you see a TNA process linked with other organisational developments?
11. What reactions do you usually receive when you announce a new initiative or change?
12. What contribution, if any, do you see TNA making to overall organisational change?
13. What difference, if any, do you see TNA making to the organisation overall?
Appendix (ii) – Sample minutes from steering group meeting.

Minutes of the Learning & Development Needs Analysis Project Steering Group

Date: Tuesday 12th February 2002, 10am to 4pm

Venue:

Present:

1. The group were welcomed to this initial meeting of Learning and Development Analysis Project Steering Group, and introductions were made.
2. The background to the project and rationale were discussed. The main areas covered were as follows:
   - Through the TEAM process training needs analysis was requested by two distinct areas within the Board, Site A and Site B. As there was more than one area requesting the same project it was decided by ---, Change Co-ordinator to make it a corporate project, and the project was passed to ---, Corporate Learning and Development Manager upon her arrival to the Board in September 2001. A Change facilitator, --- has particular expertise in research methods and statistical analysis. --- provided input from the change perspective, and the organisation development context of the work. Background work, research, and preparation work with the two areas was conducted by ---, --- and --- prior to the establishment of this steering group.
   - The training needs analysis process was set in context both in terms of the complete training process, and also in the context of the bigger picture, of what’s going on both within and outside the --- Health Board, e.g. The new Health Strategy. See documents attached.
   - It was highlighted that within the training process, which is long and complex, the element this group is focussing on would constitute the top two sections of the diagram attached, identifying needs and evaluating needs. This steering group is not concerned with other elements of the process.
   - The rational for why different people were asked to join this group was explained. The group was established to have representation from the two areas Site A and Site B who requested the programme, and also to reflect the broader range of services, grades and counties within the Board, while trying to stay within a manageable, workable number for a steering group.
   - Discussion took place regarding the issue of process versus task. The aim of this group is to look at a training needs analysis process, so
During discussion it was decided that the group should be renamed Learning & Development Needs Analysis, to reflect the wider range of elements included and to broaden the focus from the potentially narrower focus of just training courses.

It was acknowledged that ownership of training was a key element in its success in terms of decision making. It is essential that there is ownership of training and decision making at every level. To make any analysis process successful it would be essential to have management buy-in at all levels.

The whole issue of training needing to be part of a manpower plan was raised in our consideration of the bigger picture surrounding learning & development needs analysis.

A discussion also took place around the need to focus on possibilities as opposed to barriers.

The issue of equity in accessibility and opportunities for learning and development was raised as a very important factor to bear in mind.

3. The group identified ground rules for its operation, please see attached sheet.

4. The group was divided into smaller groupings to examine the concept of the learning organisation, and to develop our own concept of what a learning organisation should be. Please see attached sheets with information from the literature, and the points drawn up by the group.

5. The role of the Steering Group was examined, and terms of reference were discussed, amended and agreed. See attached sheet.

6. Wider organisational issues and their implications for the development of the -- -- Board as a learning organisation, and for the development of this process were considered and discussed. This discussion was lead by ----. The organisational issues discussed included fragmentation, urgency, dependency, leadership, identity, power, competence, inclusion, and exclusion. These organisational issues are all relevant to the task of this group and need to be factored in and considered during the work the group undertakes. For example, it would be important for the group to model what we would like the organisation to do in relation to learning and development, it will be important for us to focus on the important rather than the urgent, foster independence as opposed to dependence, identify needs within a team and therefore increase identity and so on. In addition it is very important to focus on value for money.

7. **Next Steps**

   a. Consultation is to take place outside the group at the two pilot sites
   b. Group consultation will be arranged in Site A and Site B, the consultation to be around
      i. How is the current process working? What works well?
      ii. Difficulties with current process.
      iii. What needs to happen to improve this.

In Site A 15 managers and 15 front line staff will be brought together as a representative group for a 2-hour session approximately to look at these questions.
Within Site B, a similar format will be developed including Partnership and Unions.

c. Change Facilitators will be provided to assist in the process through ----.
d. ---- and --- will go to each of the events and ---- will do an introduction and backdrop of the learning organisation, and the project to start with
e. ---- will circulate some of the training needs analysis information which has been gathered to date

f. The session with Site A will be held on the 19th March from 2-4pm in ----
g. The meeting with Site B will be held on the 20th March from 11am – 1pm in ---
h. --- and --- will meet to flesh out the next steps further before the next meeting. They will also look at other things that may need to be put in place, and bring that to the next meeting.

--- and --- to meet with the facilitators and local steering group representatives in both Site A and Site B one hour before the event starts, therefore 1pm on the 19th March, and 10am on the 20th March.

8. Timelines for the steering group were agreed as follows:

   The aim will be to have a process available for use by September of this year. This process having being piloted in June at the two pilot sites.

9. The schedule of meetings for the rest of the project is as follows:

   15th April from 10am to 4pm, venue ---
   7th May from 10am to 4pm, venue ---
   5th June from 10am to 4pm, venue ---
   6th September 2pm to 5pm, venue ---
Learning Organisation (Details from Flipchart)


- Good communication, valuing staff, clear vision and mission, and committed support of management (from the top)
- Reflective practice
- No blame culture, risk taking, learning from mistakes
- Service driven by client need
- Openness to change, innovation and creativity
- Equity
- Value diversity – individuality, all contributions important
- Knowing, valuing and using our own resources
- Giving and receiving feedback, both from staff and service users
- Flexible thinking
- Willingness to share
- Questioning

Ground rules for Learning & Development Needs Analysis Steering Group

- How we work in this group should model how we want this process to work
- Regular reports on progress will be disseminated
- Rotate meeting around the region and hold them on Health Board premises where possible
- Group members must attend in person
- The group would meet less often but for longer periods of time
- The quorum of the group shall be eight
- Each member to contact ---- office with as much notice as possible to confirm attendance, or give apologies
- Take part!!
- Minute meetings
- Mobile phones off please
Terms of Reference of Learning & Development Needs Analysis Steering Group

1. To develop a system for learning and development needs analysis which is holistic, which includes a data collection process, a method for analysis and prioritisation, and outlines a structure.
2. To document a pathway for the process.
3. To conduct a pilot of the process in Site A, and Site B, and possibly within an element of Site C.
4. Analyse and evaluate the pilot.
5. Plan the implementation of the process.

Flipchart Information regarding what’s working well from a general perspective

✓ People/staff can voice their training needs
✓ There is an expanding range of degree and diploma courses in National University.
✓ A number of studies have been completed on training needs analysis
✓ There are more training personnel
✓ Multi-disciplinary, multi-level and multi-site training initiatives have been started
✓ Personal development plans
✓ Learning sets
✓ Accreditation/quality initiatives
✓ More linking
✓ Greater awareness re lifelong learning
✓ Greater expectations that one’s learning needs will be met
✓ Demand that training be more co-ordinated and strategically managed

What’s not working well

- Inequality of access to courses
- Ad hoc in terms of selection, approval, planning release and access
- Lack of planning at every level
- Lack of reflective practise and evaluation
- Lack of database which is central, comprehensive and specific
- Lack of statistics re County, department and sector, profiles on people availing of training
- Lack of co-ordination
- Lack of strategic and HR planning
- Lack of consumer validation
What’s working well from Site A group

✔ Strategic service plan in place in line with Board and Government policy
✔ Clear service plan for 2002
✔ Commitment to training and staff development
✔ Willingness to listen
✔ Consumer/client involvement in service development
✔ Good staff resources in service (many staff well trained and developed)
✔ Good links with Institutes of Technology
✔ Some in-service training initiatives
✔ Good idea of needs

What’s not working well from Site A group

- Who covers Health & Safety training?
- Ad-hoc arrangements for allocation of training
  - Inappropriate allocation of courses
- Other training not being availed of yet essential i.e. Health & Safety Training, CPR, Lifting and handling
- Impact of training on service delivery
- Lack of co-ordination of training and personal development
- Limited in type of training and personal development on offer
- No co-ordinated Induction Programmes
- Lack of accountability on how training is allocated
- Small percentage of staff avail of the majority of training (motivation)

What’s working well from Site B Group

✔ The staff training and development group which is – Multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral
✔ Part of service plan process
✔ Analyse staff needs
✔ All training offered multi-disciplinary
✔ Monthly meetings – quarterly report
✔ Not all management want to buy into it – focus on one discipline
✔ Lack of access and equity
✔ Reactive to urgency plus minus and meeting needs
✔ Committee changes and self nomination and mixed management and front line staff
✔ Budget control
Appendix (iii)

**Questionnaire on Learning and Development Needs Analysis**

The following questions are designed to evaluate your assessment of the pilot needs analysis process undertaken in 2002, which took place in your service recently.

1. **Participation**

   (a) Did you have an opportunity to be involved in needs analysis in your area?

      Yes / No  (Please circle your choice)

      Please Comment

      ______________________________________________________________
      ______________________________________________________________
      ______________________________________________________________
      ______________________________________________________________

   (b) Were a range of different people from different levels and backgrounds involved in the needs analysis process?

      Yes / No  (Please circle your choice)

      Please Comment:

      ______________________________________________________________
      ______________________________________________________________
      ______________________________________________________________
      ______________________________________________________________
2. Process

(a) Are you clear about why you were asked initially to participate in a Learning and Development Needs Analysis?

Yes / No     (Please circle your choice)

Please Comment:
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

(b) Did you understand what you were asked to do?

Yes / No     (Please circle your choice)

Please Comment:
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
(c) Was the process explained to you?

Yes / No (Please circle your choice)

Please Comment:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

(d) Were you aware that help was available to you to implement the process?

Yes / No (Please circle your choice)

Please Comment:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

(e) What would be helpful in the future if you were to go through this process again?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
3. **Templates / Documentation**

During the process you should have received notes/templates/documentation from the OHM toolkit.

(a) Did you receive a template / documentation to assist you in identifying the needs?

Yes / No (Please circle your choice)

Please Comment:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

(b) Was the documentation easy to follow?

Yes / No (Please circle your choice)

Please Comment:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

(c) Overall, how helpful was the model you used?

Please rate on a scale of 1 – 5 by ticking the relevant boxes where 1 = not helpful, 3 = adequate, 5 = very helpful.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How helpful were the general notes?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How helpful was the SWOT analysis?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How helpful was the Learning and Development Needs Analysis checklist?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How helpful was the Learning and Development Plan?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, how helpful was the model you used?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(d) Did the template forms help your area in identifying learning and development?
needs over the coming year?

Yes / No  (Please circle your choice)

Please Comment:
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

(e)  Did the process enable your area to make achievable plans for the year ahead about Learning and Development Needs?

Yes / No  (Please circle your choice)

Please Comment:
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

(f)  If so, were these identified needs linked to your service plan?

Yes / No  (Please circle your choice)

Please Comment:
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
(g) When developing your learning and development plan did you take into account organizational, service or external priorities?

Yes / No  (Please circle your choice)

Please Comment:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

(h) Did you prioritise the Learning and Development needs identified?

Yes / No  (Please circle your choice)

Please Comment:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

(i) Were there parts of your plan that involved using existing local staff skills and resources?

Yes / No  (Please circle your choice)

Please Comment:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

(j) If yes, please give an example:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
(k) Was there any consideration of costings included in your plans?
Yes / No  (Please circle your choice)

Please Comment:
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________

(l) Was there any consideration of timescales included in your plans?
Yes / No  (Please circle your choice)

Please Comment:
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________

(m) How do you think this process will benefit you?
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________

(n) How do you think this process will benefit your service?
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
(o) Have you any further comments?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

(p) If this process is to be rolled out to other parts of the organization, what recommendations would you make for implementation?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Name_______________________              Post_____________________
(Optional)

Location____________________

Thank you for taking the time to complete and return this questionnaire.
Inclusion of your name is optional. It will be very useful in the analysis if you would include your location.

Please return this questionnaire to ----- by Monday 13th January 2002.