Unit 2: Quality and people – *Mary Rose*

2.1 Developing a quality culture

2.2 Leadership for quality

2.3 Self-learning

Summary of Unit 2

The unit explores the role of people in a quality culture and identifies some of the components of a quality culture. The significance of how an institution makes a public commitment to quality is emphasised. Readers are asked to consider the effect of different influences on their own institution's culture.

In an organisation with a quality culture, leadership is a function rather than a role. In this section of the unit, the use of distributed leadership is highlighted. Distributed leadership happens when leaders structure opportunities for leadership to be shared and when opportunities are provided for all staff to develop their leadership skills.

The impact of leadership on quality is examined and the importance of the concept of capacity building is explored. Capacity building operates at individual and organisational level. The individuals within an organisation will be fully engaged with the mission through their emotional and intellectual commitment. This leads to holistic growth, development and transformation at organisational level.

The guide encourages readers to consider the aspects of leadership, the leadership processes which promote quality and how they can be applied in their own contexts.

The final part of the unit examines an organisation's self-learning – the connection between action research and innovation and the role of change in a quality culture.

Readers are asked to reflect on how their own institution responds to new thinking and offers a tool to help readers answer "How do we know we have a culture of quality?"

Unit 2

2.1 Developing a quality culture

Making a commitment to quality starts with a vision, a shared commitment, a public statement. It provides the focus and energy for the organisation. It expresses the organisation's values. This public statement can take many forms – national curricula, mission statements, charters.

A culture of quality is created where quality in the context of the organisation is understood fully. For example, a school will be focused on student outcomes and will be committed to the equal worth and success of every learner. It will identify processes which produce quality outcomes, develop systems which establish how quality will be judged and set quality standards which are able to be verified.

What influences the culture of your organisation? For example, examination results, funding streams, external expectations, expertise of staff?

Both public and private sector institutions have sought to communicate their standards through public statements of their educational principles and of the promises they make to their clients.

What they all have in common is the recognition that it is impossible to have systems and procedures for quality unless everyone knows what they are and that they are understood and acted on.

Are there differences and similarities between the quality cultures and commitment of public and private sector institutions?

■ A commitment to quality implies an institutional culture committed to continuous improvement.

Without this explicit commitment it also becomes impossible to observe quality or to assess it.

The CD-Rom contains many examples of mission statements, charters, guarantees, etc. Look at a selection of these and examine how they:

■ set aims and objectives for the institution;

■ make the values of the institution explicit;

■ describe quality;

■ identify clients, both internal and external;

■ make commitments and promises which involve all those working in the institution;

■ indicate the expectations that clients may have.

■ A quality culture is a learning culture in which all members of the institution are involved; a self-critical, improving culture in which all staff are fully engaged. A culture which allows each individual to understand his/her contribution to achieving the shared vision and to answering the question "What difference am I trying to make personally?"

After viewing the CD-Rom, it is helpful to consider what indicated to you that the institutions in the examples had made a commitment to quality.

Activity

Think about how your institution expresses its commitment to quality.

Is it clear?
Is everyone aware of it?
How is this shared?

When you visit or work with another institution, what indicates to you that the institution has made a commitment to quality?

Discuss this in pairs or in small groups.

2.2 Leadership for quality

Leaders, in all areas of an organisation, are central to developing and sustaining quality; in how clear vision and sense of purpose is demonstrated and in how a commitment to shared vision and common purpose is built. This applies to all leaders, not only to the directors or principals of institutions. Everyone in the organisation who has a leadership role, in whatever form, is instrumental in shaping the culture of the organisation. The quality of this leadership will be evident in its effectiveness in motivating and influencing staff and building teams.

In a quality culture many members of the organisation will have opportunities to lead. The sharing of leadership functions may be described as distributed leadership. Where this happens staff are enabled to develop their personal leadership skills.

It is the role of leaders in an organisation to ensure that all available resources are developed and used fully; this applies to human resources. Leaders will want to ensure that the whole-hearted engagement and commitment of all staff to the organisation's mission is secured. This is frequently referred to as building the capacity of the organisation.

Activity

Identify a leader that you admire – what are the key characteristics that this leader demonstrates?

In pairs/threes discuss the characteristics you have identified.

Activity

Think about how people in your organisation demonstrate commitment to its mission. Identify and describe the visible signs of this commitment.

Discuss this in pairs.

Some indicators of an institution where the leadership understands this concept of capacity building will be:

■ a positive climate;

■ transparent management;

■ people-centred, where people are positioned at the centre of the organisation.

Full engagement with the organisation's mission will depend on both the emotional and intellectual commitment of the staff.

Emotional capacity grows through shared vision, strong commitment to the institution's values, ambitions and goals.

The extent to which the emotional capacity of the workforce has been built in an organisation will be reflected in the institution-wide expectations and responsibilities.

Intellectual capacity is founded in emotional commitment and is grown through consistent, stimulating professional development, learning dialogues and experiences which enable a deep understanding of the organisation's mission to develop.

In an organisation, individuals will have values and beliefs. It is essential that leaders understand how individuals interact in order to help them share values and beliefs, to clarify what is valued and to build a shared vision. Where distributed leadership is practised, greater synergy within and between teams is developed. It is important that leaders recognise and nurture the interdependence within the institution in order to build capacity effectively. This nurturing of interdependence is intrinsically linked to the development of a quality culture.

Activity

Think about the ways in which leaders in your organisation build the organisation's capacity. For example, does the structure of the institution support the functioning of teams? Is team review a feature of working processes?

Discuss this in pairs or in small groups.

In a quality culture, different dimensions of leadership will be evident. Effective leadership is multidimensional.

Some examples of dimensions of leadership:

■ moral leadership. This is grounded in personal and professional values;

■ strategic leadership. This is clearly focused on policy, organisation and implementation to achieve goals;

■ managerial leadership. This focuses on function and tasks;

■ collaborative leadership. This is based on democratic principles and encourages the participation of all stakeholders;

■ interpersonal leadership. This centres on collaboration and interpersonal relationships;

■ distributed leadership. This engages a range of people in leadership activity, it extends the boundaries of leadership beyond delegation. Leadership is a function rather than a role.

Effective leadership recognises the diverse needs of the institution and adapts leadership styles to suit the context. Effective leaders will draw from a personal repertoire based on "fitness for purpose".

Whatever the approach to leadership style, it is the leadership processes which underpin this that promote quality.

Activity for a small group

Case study: a language school
Read the scenario summary. Consider what steps a new leader could take to help move this organisation to one with a high capacity for quality.

Scenario: a language school
In this scenario the language school currently has a low capacity for quality. There are a number of challenges:

■ managers encourage staff to overcome these but the existing structures do not enable staff to work together;

■ a number of managerial tasks are devolved to staff but they are not given the autonomy to deal with new tasks;

■ the focus on teaching and learning is not strong;

■ staff are expected to use innovative teaching methods but have limited time and very few opportunities to test and develop new ideas;

■ staff work mainly in informal groups on an ad hoc basis. They find it difficult to understand how their work fits with other developments;

■ there is high staff turnover.

The following cluster of skills will be evident in a quality culture:

■ active listening, empathising;

■ giving feedback, giving praise;

■ managing conflict, negotiating;

■ networking.

In a quality culture, effective leaders enable institutions to become successful, professional learning institutions, setting directions, developing people, developing the organisation and responding productively to opportunities and challenges.

Effective leaders ensure the institution's outcomes remain focused on its mission, for example, a language school will be focused on students' language achievements.

Consider your own institution. In your view what are the essential leadership characteristics and leadership processes needed for your organisation's success?

The CD-Rom has a number of institutional case studies. Consider the dimensions of leadership that are evident in the examples you choose to read.

2.3 Self-learning

Importantly, in a culture of quality, institutional self-learning is constant; institutions that enquire into their practice generate their own knowledge.

The tools and instruments for self-assessment at institutional and individual level are essential features of an organisation's self-learning. Using action research strategies places enquiry about practice at the heart of an organisation. Action research enables practitioners to reflect on and analyse practice in the specific context of the institution. Through action research, which may be a collaborative or an individual activity, the teacher or teachers are able to:

■ investigate key issues in teaching and learning;

■ turn data and experience into new knowledge;

■ use evidence to inform decisions;

■ use enquiry for staff development.

The outcomes help teachers to find practical solutions to real learning challenges, stimulating new ideas and innovative practice.

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) offers a helpful framework for looking at the quality of applied and practice-based research. The four dimensions of quality are identified as epistemic: methodological and theoretical robustness, technological, capacity development and value for people, and economic. An extract from the framework shows the quality sub-dimensions which may be used to develop criteria for assessing the quality of research. The extract shows the sub-dimension to use when practitioners are engaged in action research.

 Reflect on your institution's strategies for enquiring into its practice. How is this done?

Extract from the ESRC Framework for Assessing Quality[4]

Dimensions of quality			
Epistemic: methodological and theoretical robustness	Technological	Capacity development and value for people	Economic
		Plausibility Partnership collaboration and engagement Reflexivity, deliberation and criticism Receptiveness Transformation and personal growth	

Activity

Think about how you would assess the quality of action research and enquiry-based learning in your institution. The sub-dimensions in the extract from the ESRC framework may be helpful in this consideration. Discuss this in pairs or small groups.

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4   Furlong and Oancea (2005: 15). The report was developed as a result of a study carried out for the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

Unit 2: Quality and people

The CD-Rom contains a number of examples of how institutions in the state sector are developing self-reflection and structured analysis of practice. Look at a selection of these and identify how they:

■ gather evidence of practice;

■ promote staff involvement in enquiry;

■ evaluate effectiveness;

■ through enquiry activities, generate knowledge about how to develop what is worthwhile.

In a quality culture, evidence is robust, "first-hand" and used confidently to analyse practice.

Activity

After looking at the examples given on the CD-Rom consider the attitudes evident in your institution. Is there a commitment to engage in a continuous process of reflection and analysis? Does this process result in action?

Discuss this in pairs.

Managing the future

An organisation with an embedded culture of quality is adaptable and forward looking.

An institution committed to continuous improvement, with established quality processes and systems, is a learning organisation. It will understand the change process and know that continued professional development and training are crucial to embedding change and sustaining quality.

An organisation with the confidence and capacity for innovation will encourage risk taking, secure in the knowledge that this enables radical change. New ideas are tested and developed into leading-edge practice.

The change process is used creatively to move the institution forward; change and innovation are embraced when they enable the paradigm shift to a quality culture with a focus on future needs.

Historically, it was the function of institutions to teach knowledge. Today, we accept that institutions need to teach students how to learn and an institution with a culture of quality will recognise clients' needs.

Activity

Consider how your organisation manages change.

Choose one of the two activities that follow to help you discuss and explore this in a small group.

1. Think about the future of your institution's work. What further pedagogical and organisational changes do you believe necessary?

2. What changes has your institution made in the last three years to provide for:
   ■ new ways of viewing knowledge;
   ■ new understanding about the nature of learning;
   ■ changing career pathways;
   ■ new patterns of global interaction between organisations;
   ■ new information technologies?

Summary reflection

Reflect on the following key questions:

What are my institution's most significant skills and capabilities?

What do our clients really want?

What problems and challenges do we need to overcome?

Are my perceptions of the institution's culture shared by my colleagues?

Looking back over the last three years what would I change?

Would I recommend the institution to a friend:
- to work there?
- to study there?

These questions bring together some of the key ideas explored in the unit. They may be used individually or in a group to support an objective understanding of the institution's current culture.

Assessment and validation

How do we know we have a culture of quality?

A continuum[5] is a useful tool for providing a picture of the current position. For the following assessment activity a simple continuum of 1 to 5 is suggested.

Consider the examples given in the descriptors, where would you place your institution on the following continuum?

What reasons would you give for the positioning of your institution in each instance?

Institutional values are not shared and are rarely discussed	1 2 3 4 5	Institutional values are shared, they are real and acted on constantly
Leaders are mainly concerned with procedures and systems	1 2 3 4 5	Leaders are involved with people
Communication in the institution is always "top down"	1 2 3 4 5	There is open, effective dialogue and communication with all in the institution
Working groups have limited sense of purpose	1 2 3 4 5	Confident, self-managing teams are evident
Lack of success is considered a failure	1 2 3 4 5	Mistakes are learned from and different strategies tried
Risk taking is discouraged	1 2 3 4 5	Risk taking is viewed as part of the learning process

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5   Risk taking is viewed as part of the learning process.

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