Learning today, leading tomorrow

Skills and learning for the housing industry of the future

Edited by John Thornhill

With foreword by Chan Kataria and Grainia Long
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The Chartered Institute of Housing

The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) is the independent voice for housing and the home of professional standards. Our goal is simple – to provide housing professionals with the advice, support and knowledge they need to be brilliant.

CIH is a registered charity and not-for-profit organisation. This means that the money we make is put back into the organisation and funds the activities we carry out to support the housing industry.

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East Midlands Housing Group

EMH Group has been investing in communities across the East Midlands for over 65 years, and is one of the largest providers of housing, care and specialist support services in the region.

Over the last few years, EMH Group has gone through a period of significant growth and diversification. The Group has an annual turnover of £90m and employs around 1,200 people.

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The Group has a number of social enterprise initiatives to address issues of exclusion. The establishment of EMH Academy provides opportunities for young apprentices to develop skills and gain access to employment. EMH Group is also the UK’s only social housing partner in a European Union digital literacy pilot seeking to train groups of people traditionally excluded from digital learning.

Further information is available at: www.emhgroup.co.uk or contact Pritti Allen at pritti.allen@emha.org

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Foreword

By Chan Kataria
Group Chief Executive of East Midlands Housing (EMH) Group

The housing industry is in a period of unprecedented change – a protracted period of austerity has delivered a tougher operating environment, there have been transformations in both the political vision and aspirations for housing; and a new drive on the part of providers to deliver social value through business value. Technology is transforming service delivery; and our customer base is becoming increasingly diverse and discerning.

These radical transformations have only just begun. The housing industry is likely to face many more volatile years ahead, bringing with them not just challenges, but new opportunities for a reinvigorated service offer. How housing providers achieve decisive leadership in response to this changing landscape and support skills development among staff and communities will be among the key challenges for the future.

CIH and EMH Group brought together over 30 experts from housing and learning to discuss these issues and to horizon-scan the future; focusing specifically on identifying and describing the skills, knowledge and behaviours which will be needed for the profession of the future. This anthology provides a fascinating insight into the diverse ways in which the housing industry is changing and the impact this will have on skills and learning needs. It offers invaluable insights into how organisations can future-proof their business and exploit new opportunities through nurturing and managing talent and delivering cultures of learning focused on delivering both business and social value.

EMH Group has already embarked upon a skills for the future project which is strategically driven and targets leaders, front-line staff and customers also. We are delighted to be able to share our vision and learning with you in this anthology. In addition, our commitment to exploring the transformational possibilities of learning for business, staff and communities is why we have been excited to support CIH with the development of this publication.

I hope that you will find Learning today, leading tomorrow an engaging and stimulating resource which will spark creative conversations about skills and learning within your
own organisation. I hope it will also provide opportunities for you to explore and share best practice and encourage you to join this most pressing debate for the housing industry: how do we learn today, so that we might lead tomorrow.

Chan Kataria
Foreword

By Grainia Long
Chief Executive of the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH)

When I consider the scale and level of transformation taking place across the housing industry, *Learning today, leading tomorrow* could not be more timely. I am delighted that CIH and East Midlands Housing Group have worked in partnership on this important resource for housing professionals.

Change brings new challenges as well as new opportunities for organisations, their leaders, their staff and their customers. Increasing commercialisation, more complex partnerships, multidisciplinary relationships and a rapidly changing political environment can leave organisations and individuals concerned with their ability to keep up with developments.

Within organisations, I have witnessed an increased emphasis on developing entrepreneurial and leadership skills to empower employees to identify solutions to emerging issues rather than rely on past experiences. Building employees’ technical knowledge now sits beside the development of research skills to ensure the organisation has access to meaningful insights from the ever increasing information and data available to it.

One of the fundamental roles of a professional body is to set professional standards and to support its members to respond to the demands of their employment. CIH does this by identifying the knowledge, skills and behaviours professionals need for the future. We help provide a clear pathway to professional excellence and a culture of life-long learning amongst members to ensure that the profession will be able to meet the demands of a changing environment. A reflective professional has the ability to analyse and critique their performance, identify gaps in their skills and knowledge and take responsibility for their individual development needs.

CIH is responding to the challenges facing the housing industry by providing flexible, up-to-date training and education that can be adapted to the needs of individual organisations. Through our investment in research and development and close engagement with stakeholders across the industry, we will ensure that standards are driven higher and the profession is equipped for the future.
I never cease to be amazed by the ability of housing professionals to learn and adapt to new environments. I hope that *Learning today, leading tomorrow* will provide a further resource to enable the industry to make the most of new opportunities as they arise.

Grainia Long
Part one

Learning today
Introduction to Part one – learning today

By John Thornhill, Learning Officer at CIH

‘The future you have, tomorrow, won’t be the same future you had, yesterday.’
Chuck Palahniu, Rant

The housing industry is changing exponentially – social, political, economic and technological developments have contributed to the most expansive period for the industry in living memory; and they will continue to lead to new approaches to the ways in which we deliver social and business value in the future.

These seismic shifts bring with them both challenges and opportunities for individual and collective learning. They are already impacting on the knowledge, skills and behaviours that housing professionals require to navigate this rapidly diverging landscape. They will also transform the ways in which housing organisations learn and manage talent; so those same organisations will become the thriving businesses of tomorrow.

This anthology explores these twin themes: navigating unprecedented and continuous change and predicting the skills and learning needed for the future. The selection of articles in this publication are the outcome of a joint project between CIH and EMH Group which has brought together a spectrum of diverse and dynamic voices from leading lights in learning across the housing industry. Its aim is to explore and illustrate how housing organisations should learn today so they can in turn lead tomorrow.

This anthology is split into two parts.

Part one is entitled Learning today and it considers the key challenges and opportunities currently impacting on housing and learning and how they are likely to develop in the near future. Part one explores:

• How the housing world is changing and how this is creating new opportunities and challenges which housing organisations need to engage with in order to respond dynamically to the future.

• The new forms of knowledge, skills and behaviours required by housing professionals to enable them to thrive in the emerging housing industry.

• New opportunities for, and new ways of, learning which will enskill, upskill and empower both people working in housing and communities.
Part two is called Leading tomorrow and it illustrates how housing organisations are already transforming their businesses by embracing new cultures of learning in the workplace and in communities where they operate. In particular part two explores:

- The characteristics of effective learning organisations and what we can learn from them.
- Creative and effective talent management strategies aimed at future-proofing businesses and communities.
- How housing providers are working to successfully transform their businesses into high performing learning organisations.
- How networking and technology are opening up new opportunities for knowledge sharing and collective learning.
- How a visionary and strategic approach to learning and skills can transform the opportunities and life-chances of individuals in communities.

**How the housing industry is changing**

*The best way to predict your future is to create it.*

Abraham Lincoln

A number of key themes have emerged in the course of compiling this anthology which are setting the parameters within which the housing industry is defining its destiny. These points of reference have guided our conversation concerning the opportunities and risks for learning, skills development and talent management both now and in the future. The following points are illustrative, not exhaustive; but they do highlight some of the key themes which are explored in more detail in this anthology.

**Changing social and political vision for housing** – Across all colours of the political spectrum, there is a move away from welfarist approaches to housing towards a vision based on co-production with the aim of delivering more sustainable social and economic returns. Co-production means delivering public services in a way which encourages a more equal and reciprocal relationship between professionals, people using services and communities. It is believed that where activities are co-produced, both services and neighbourhoods become far more effective agents of change. This approach is not new to the UK. In recent decades, the search for new models of organising the welfare system and providing socially focused services has been a pressing concern in all developed welfare societies. Economic liberalism coupled with creeping austerity and fiscal constraint are leading to a refocusing of social protection on those deemed in
greatest need. This also includes growing emphasis on conditionality, supporting self-sufficiency; and generating capacity for social and economic mobility. It is likely that whichever party forms the next Westminster government post 2015, housing providers will have to reinforce their role as community development partners and enablers.

**Growing commercial focus** – The housing industry has become more self-conscious of its commercial foundations. This has been accelerated by a combination of factors in recent years including:

- Reductions in capital subsidy and a tougher affordable rent settlement.
- Sluggish bank lending as the wider economy gradually recovers from the banking crisis.
- Enhanced economic regulation and a greater drive for value for money services and more efficient asset management.
- The introduction of universal credit as a combined benefit paid directly to recipients coupled with stringent benefit capping.
- Growing pressures on the industry to source alternative funding, for example, from capital markets in the form of bond finance.

While these commercial drivers are not antithetical to the social vision of housing providers, they are transforming the business of organisations which have evolved from public, social or philanthropic origins. Housing organisations are looking to redefine their values and goals and are asking if they have the *right* people, with the *right* knowledge, skills and behaviours in the *right* positions of governance and leadership to steer them towards a more commercially focused future.

**Greater diversification in the housing industry** – There is a dramatic shift taking place in the housing industry which is moving the conversation concerning the role and purpose of affordable housing away from a crude dichotomy between achieving *social value* and *business value*. In varying degrees, housing providers are seeking out and maximising new commercial opportunities to deliver, support and enhance their offer to communities; and they are looking at ways to take communities with them on this new journey. Many housing organisations are already diversifying their business portfolios: (e.g. some are managing academies, delivering community enterprises, supporting apprenticeships, community skills and training, publishing newspapers, running local radio stations and engaging with an increasingly wide spectrum of community partners).
The pursuit of new business ventures (and business with and for the community) will develop in ways hitherto unimagined. A key challenge for the housing industry will be how to respond to this greater business diversity with the need for a broader range of skills and knowledge sets.

**More complex partnerships** – In recent years the operating environment for housing providers has been characterised by the development of, and need for, more complex partnership working. The new health and social care landscape will have a transformative impact on partnership working; and public spending cuts and efficiency drivers will continue to revolutionise the way in which service providers commission and deliver relevant and value for money services. This will drive a need for more creative partnerships, outsourcing and insourcing arrangements, mergers and group structures.

**Transformational technology** – The rapid pace of social and technological innovation has had far-reaching effects on all aspects of modern life. So, given the astonishing rate of change, what does the next decade hold for learning and development in the face of technological innovation? Technology has already transformed the way in which many roles are performed in the sector. The use of tablets, social media and CRM systems have changed the way in which data is collated and used. It is also changing the way in which services are provided and the way in which relationships with customers are managed. With specific regards to tenants, there will be an ongoing need to actively support digital inclusion and to engage with the *consumerisation* of information and technology. Positive engagement with the opportunities new technology offers will enable both staff and tenants to research their own solutions, form their own support networks; and solve their own problems. Challenges associated with the exponential growth and impact of technology in the workplace and communities include:

- The emergence of complex roles which will require specific knowledge sets and will also require greater dexterity using new technology.
- Some current process tasks will become redundant and new ways of working will emerge defined by technology in terms of its functional capacity and also in terms of the transformational effect it will have on customer expectations and aspirations.
- There will be a need to better understanding how professional values and ethics can be incorporated with the use of new technology.
- Helping both staff and tenants learn how to find out information for themselves using information and technology will support greater self-sufficiency.
More personalised services, better customer focused services – Better awareness of the housing customer has been a marked characteristic of the past decade. The consumerisation of all aspects of the housing industry has been accelerated by the following factors:

- Growing awareness of the relationship between choice and empowerment in the delivery of public services; where effective choice offers the individual opportunities to actively engage with decisions which most intimately affect their life opportunities.
- A new co-regulatory approach to consumer protection where landlords aspire to develop tenant focused services; and tenants themselves are directly involved in service determination and scrutiny.
- A cross-political consensus which has aimed to devolve powers and decision making from central government to local communities.
- The development and refinement of customer insight information to support landlords better understand and connect with their customer base; and to use this information to inform and improve services. Key to this is a better understanding of tenants as customers; and a more sophisticated appreciation of their ambitions, drivers, barriers and aspirations.

In addition to the articles contained in this anthology, this project was supported by three learning and skills for housing roundtables held between March and April 2013. These roundtables engaged a variety of opinions from across housing and learning. The panorama of views shared in this anthology do not necessarily reflect those of either CIH or EMH Group; and they are not intended to be representative of the housing industry in its diversity. But they do, however, capture the energy and dynamism of a debate which is crucial for the survival and success of organisations operating in tomorrow's housing world.
Future-proofing the housing profession – responding to challenge in the 21st century

By Veronica Coatham, Head of Housing and Community Studies, Birmingham City University and Professor Anne Hill, Housing and Educational Consultant

Summary

In a period of rapid change, how people working in the housing industry are trained and developed needs to keep pace and evolve. Following an examination of the pressures facing the housing profession there is an exploration of what this means for the education and development of housing professionals of the future. This paper argues that there are opportunities presented which can support a different approach to learning and development which should help create this new professional, who is reflexive, adaptable and able to grow to meet any future challenges.

Introduction – the changing context for social housing

Over the last hundred years or so social housing organisations have developed strategies for combining their business role of developing, maintaining and letting properties to that of providing support to vulnerable households and community engagement. However, recent government policy is challenging the equilibrium which has existed for many years, both forcing and incentivising social housing landlords to move away from a ‘social’ model to a more business-focused, commercial model, which challenges the traditional ethos and values of the sector.

For staff at all levels this presents a dilemma as there is a mismatch between expectations to keep people securely housed and the need to take a tougher approach to protect and manage the asset base. Social housing landlords are developing new forms of tenure which are attracting new client groups with different expectations of service from their landlords. Yet homelessness is also increasingly affecting a more diverse range of households. In addition, although central government suggests its recent agenda is providing space for innovation; social housing organisations are experiencing a number of complex policy changes emanating from different ministerial departments, intended to drive through political priorities such as the need for establishing stringent austerity measures in the public sector and most recently, responding to public pressures over immigration. These centrally driven priorities do
not always sit easily with the commitment to localism championed by the same Coalition Government.

Taken together these trends are impacting upon the vision, values and principles now feeding into business planning processes, with implications for delivery planning and use of current and future assets. Questions are being posed by a range of housing commentators as it is becoming clear that for the foreseeable future the housing industry will be operating in a climate of financial prudence, efficiency gains and dwindling public funding. Taking a longer term view it is unlikely that things will ever revert back to the status quo, which perhaps never really existed: such is the diversity of the housing industry. However, housing organisations have proved themselves to be resilient, adaptable and pragmatic and there is no reason to suppose that they will not continue to be so in the future.

The changing context for housing education and learning

For many professional bodies the emphasis in their programmes of learning leading to professional membership has been on developing specific knowledge and skills associated with the particular subject discipline. This has been no different for CIH with its emphasis on promoting the ‘art and science of housing’ (CIH Royal Charter). This approach has also been perpetuated by other sector based organisations involved in promoting and establishing standards for different occupations. Hence what we have in the housing industry is a plethora of lists of skills and competencies required for working in different parts of the industry, perpetuating the prescriptive, functionally based approach to analysing housing work rather than a more strategic analysis of organisational needs across a range of housing organisations.

Professional housing education has traditionally been delivered on a part time basis with learning also taking place on the job. Whilst there is still a demand for badged, formally recognised qualifications, which provide students and employers with the evidence-base for recognition, the way in which this is being delivered is changing. Accredited undergraduate and postgraduate housing courses run by colleges and universities in England are diminishing in number and in-house certificates delivered at Levels 2, 3 and 4 (all sub-degree qualifications) are increasingly being supported by organisations. These certificates tend to focus on immediate, job related competencies reflecting structural roles rather than developing the skills and competencies that people bring with them. For example, we know of graduates who are being placed on Level 2 courses (equivalent to GCSE), because the job they have only ‘merits’ that qualification. There also appears to be a current reduction in numbers moving on to achieve CIH Chartered
Membership through the professional qualification, as pressure on organisational budgets may be focussing employers and employees to look for immediate rather than longer term returns. This doesn’t enable either employers or graduate employees to move their organisations forward to meet future challenges affecting the industry.

Skills needs to meet the new operating environment

As the social housing sector diversifies, there is pressure on a ‘one size fits all’ professional housing qualification or sector skills specification. Increasingly organisations are seeking learning ‘products’ that meet their organisational development needs rather than qualifications that only benefit individuals (though we would argue that this is a short term view).

With reduced rental income anticipated as a result of welfare reforms and reduced subsidies to invest in assets; organisations need to adopt more commercially aware practices. This means that wherever they are situated in the business, staff need to be aware that what they are delivering is a part of the business plan. Staff need to be equipped to operate effectively in the leaner world into which we are moving; and leaders will need to make the right decisions which take their teams forward. This will lead to equipping existing staff and new recruits with skills associated with the managerialist rather than professional paradigms – but the two need not be mutually exclusive and this is where with some creative thinking a new housing professional can emerge.

A new housing professional

By way of illustration, the repairs and maintenance side of the social housing industry has been grappling with the challenges around an ageing workforce and anticipated skills shortages for some time. There are many examples of social housing organisations developing schemes to enskill people from local communities and working with local schools to ensure that they have a workforce with the right skills for the future. As part of this forward planning, thought is being given to the creation of career paths for technical staff working in repairs and maintenance functions to move into management and supervisor roles. Attention is being given to balancing the time spent away from the workplace for formal study and training needs with maintaining the service. Hence there is an increasing emphasis on more job related training.

Organisations could also be thinking about how they can attract good graduates, building on the opportunities presented by working in the industry. We need to better
promote the diversity of work roles and the chance to make a difference to people’s lives that working in housing brings. In one Guardian article, a chief executive of a housing association is quoted as saying that he wants to spread the career net widely to attract graduates with a range of degrees who can add value to the organisation but he emphasises that graduates with housing degrees are not wanted! With 50,000 more graduates entering the employment market in 2012 than 2007, housing organisations are in a strong position to recruit according to their espoused values and attitudes, such as social justice. Graduates should bring with them proven intellectual ability, be able to manage their own development, be motivated and bring a fresh approach to an organisation as we move into a tighter operating environment.

Yet the way that social housing organisations still recruit staff may be making it more difficult for graduates to break into the industry. There is still an expectation that skills are honed through volunteering and internships. However, some forward thinking organisations such as Sanctuary and Hanover have developed special websites to appeal to graduates, backed up by structured development opportunities to attract the best graduates. On the other hand some organisations have abandoned their graduate trainee schemes, preferring instead to adopt apprenticeship models and schemes that open up opportunities for the local community.

There is increasing evidence too of local authorities putting in place schemes to recruit staff with appropriate skills for the strategic housing function role of a local authority. These include both the technical skills, relating to understanding how housing markets work and housing finance, together with project management, research and data analysis skills and also the softer skills, which help to build trust with local decision makers such as the councillors and cabinets in each local authority area. Within the homeless sector the Leading Places of Change (LPoC) programme has had a significant impact in developing leaders to transform services for homeless people.

**A new paradigm for learning?**

As we are witnessing a seismic shift in the operating climate for housing organisations arguably this should be reflected in how staff are supported and enskilled. This shouldn’t mean that we stop informing staff about the social, economic and historical context that has influenced the development of the housing industry – after all these have influenced organisational cultures – but rather layered onto this should be a programme of value-based skills development enabling staff to work in different parts of the organisation. Flexibility and adaptability are skills often highlighted as being desirable in helping organisations to become more agile in how they make their businesses work better.
Examples of the skills and competencies that would enable this to happen include:

- **Research skills** – where to go for information, generating evidence in the form of both quantitative and qualitative data to inform and justify decisions.

- **Project management skills** – identifying the key products, services and policies in order to make better use of resources and assets and drive forward innovation. Relevant skills will include financial, budget management, systems development and processing skills.

- **Managerial skills** – working in and leading teams, motivation and communication skills.

This challenges the traditional view of a professional curriculum where students need to know ‘stuff’ rather than be able to adapt, adopt and change to suit the different demands of the industry going forward.

Broader and adaptable learning outcomes and assessment criteria are therefore needed which will enable staff to demonstrate a diverse range of skills in a range of contexts. Another way of doing this would be to use a diverse range of scenarios as learning tools reflecting the type of roles that people are doing today, how they carry out these roles, identifying what skills and competencies are needed to develop roles so the learner then responds creatively to a range of issues. With this is an emerging consensus that staff should take responsibility for their own learning and become flexible lifelong learners.

Recent responses to developing and enskilling staff have been through the increasing use of in-house, online and blended learning models of delivery, so reaching more staff at a range of academic, practical and organisational levels. There is still an emphasis on underpinning knowledge acquisition but increasingly this is being assessed through problem based scenarios requiring learners to provide evidence of their developing skills and competencies supported by both theoretical and practice perspectives.

The development of online learning generates possibilities for a whole new range of delivery models to support learning. This needs to be carefully planned to ensure it introduces students to the critical debates, discussions and commentaries which challenge current practices and informs thinking that will move us forward rather than reinforcing the status quo. Online learning, together with a menu of other delivery models such as action learning sets, work-based learning, classroom based delivery using a range of study resources (including text based resources) supported by individualised, tailored and tutored or mentored support, provides learners with a rich and diverse menu of learning opportunities.
Conclusion

The objective should be to create a reflexive housing professional who knows not only where to get the information they need to make rational decisions but who also have the skills and competencies to make change happen and do the right thing. For CIH this means taking a fresh look at what it means to be a housing professional who can take the social housing industry forward yet maintain traditional ethics and values. We have the opportunity to review and reshape professional standards and how these are acquired to develop a modern profession, comfortable with its origins but which does not stand still and stagnate as the world around us changes.

Key points

- The context for social housing is changing more rapidly than ever.
- This in turn is leading housing organisations to review educational and employee development priorities, which is impacting on the number of people progressing towards professional qualifications and moving into CIH membership.
- In response to a rapidly changing environment the way in which professional qualifications are delivered is becoming increasingly diverse which means delivery methods need to be kept under review to ensure they reflect sector priorities and preferences.
- The housing industry is seeking people who have ready-made skills and knowledge, and is in a strong position to attract promising graduates and develop their potential.
- Through taking a creative approach to the design, development and delivery of programmes of learning, advantage can be taken of new media and a range of learning approaches to develop key, value-based skills including research, project management and managerial skills and competencies.
- We can rise to the challenge of creating reflexive housing professionals who maintain professional values and ethics, and take the housing industry forward.
Delivering housing learning in a tough environment

By Dr Jo Richardson, Principal Lecturer, Centre for Comparative Housing Research, Department of Politics and Public Policy, De Montfort University, Leicester

Summary

We are working in a tough environment where the impact of austerity and the gradual withdrawing of government and public services in communities is being felt keenly by the most vulnerable in our society. This article examines what the housing academy can do to support practitioners’ learning to best meet the challenges they face. It will, first set out the changing context for learning before outlining some key themes debated with housing employers on their vision for the future; and then it will set out a re-imagined future for housing learning which is robust enough and flexible enough to support the housing industry of the future.

The changing context for learning

The context for housing professionals is shifting in a new political and economic order, so must the landscape change for organisations delivering housing learning. We need to continue to work with organisations in the social housing sector, and increasingly those in the private sector, and quickly respond to the changing environment with tailored solutions. Gone are the days when students have to physically attend a university to be lectured to on a subject that we think is broadly relevant to the industry as a whole. Today’s housing courses are much more dynamic, both in mode of delivery and content and they need to continue to be flexible to change. We are working and learning in a tough environment and there are many challenges for local government and public sector services following the financial crisis.

When I first started as a housing practitioner the key skills I needed were technical knowledge of housing law, and an understanding of lettings, estate management, dealing with anti-social behaviour, customer skills and empathy for those in difficult situations. I moved to a policy and practice role at CIH and, in addition to technical and context knowledge, I needed to develop written communication skills and enhance my own research and enquiry skills. The MSc Housing programme I was studying at the time created a framework for me to do this. Now in my role as an educator at De Montfort University (DMU) and programme leader of the supported online learning CIH
MSc Housing Studies, there is a responsibility to ensure housing practitioners today have the framework they need to undertake, with competence and confidence, such diverse tasks as working with private sector landlords, negotiating on development opportunities, advising customers on welfare reform, planning for new homes and collaboratively commissioning services, as well as the technical, legal and management functions that are needed.

**Engaging with employers**

At DMU we talk to employers in our region about the skills and knowledge they think are necessary and important for housing staff to meet the new challenges. This is done in a variety of ways, for example an annual event we hold at DMU in partnership with the CIH East Midlands Board brings together a large group of professionals. I am also involved in the Higher Level Skills project run by Asset Skills which supports networks between Higher Education Institutions (HEI) and employers. Together, DMU and Asset Skills have run seminars, such as one for Midlands housing employers in March 2013 on ‘The Future of Housing Education – 2020 Insight’. Participants at that event were asked what they wanted from higher education courses; this was not focused on curriculum content but more generic issues. Employer responses suggested they wanted a course which would achieve the following outcomes:

- Enhance research and enquiry skills.
- Increase personal effectiveness and good communication.
- Develop critical thinking skills and intellectual autonomy.
- Work increasingly across disciplines.
- Meet the needs of employers.

In addition employers wanted housing education which was of good quality as determined by the reputation of the HEI and the expertise of tutors, and they wanted flexible modes of delivery and value for money. There was a debate on course accreditation by a professional body and this was seen as something more important to the individual student than the employer *per se*.

The question: ‘which professional body?’ was raised by participants suggesting that, increasingly, organisations like the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) and the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) were relevant to them – CIH is not the only game in town. There is clearly work that CIH, in partnership with HEIs, must do to make organisations see the value in
employing members who have undertaken accredited housing programmes. CIHCM on a CV should stand out as a beacon of quality; it should say to employers that this person has the skills of research and enquiry necessary to undertake a range of roles across the housing industry.

At a prior meeting of the DMU/Asset Skills network in October 2012, employers were asked more about curriculum content – ‘what housing subjects should students be able to master as a result of their study?’ The diversity of roles in the housing profession was reflected in their answers, some of which included:

- Housing development.
- Land economics.
- Private rented sector.
- Customer skills and insight.
- Finance and budgets.
- Planning.
- Health and social care.

There is a diversity in the subject content needed by practitioners in the housing industry, especially so in the current tough environment. Learning organisations need to reflect this diversity in their curriculum but they also need to offer variety in the method of delivery too. Technology is increasingly important in delivery, especially for supported online products like the CIH MSc programme which I lead on. Students also need to be supported in using technology to enhance their learning, rather than it being a further obstacle. We must not be blinded by technology and the diversity of the curriculum needed though – core skills such as independent research and enquiry and also critical analysis are vital in enhancing the quality of the skills level in the housing industry and we place great emphasis on this, particularly at postgraduate level, here at DMU. I would argue that delivering housing education is not about ‘teaching’ topic areas – instead it is about developing skills of research, analysis and communication that can be applied in a variety of circumstances. At DMU we are increasingly thinking in terms of providing the scaffolding that students need to have in place to build their own learning, which is of relevance to them and their organisations.

This scaffolding can be in the form of traditional courses, such as our part-time face-to-face Foundation Degree in Housing and Sustainable Communities, or it might be through supported online learning programmes such as the courses we run in
partnership with CIH – the undergraduate Professional Diploma and the postgraduate MSc Housing Studies. These programmes are constantly updated and amended to reflect the needs of employers in the housing industry and they build upon the professional learning outcomes set by CIH. These learning outcomes were slightly updated a few years ago, but I believe now is the time for a more thorough revision of these by CIH and their HEI partners in response to evidence from housing organisations on what is needed to equip CIHCM. This is not the sum total of housing education for the future though; professionals may choose to align more with the outcomes of other professional bodies such as RICS and ILM. HEIs need to be flexible and prepared to look outside the traditional boundaries of the social housing sector to make sure that the future of housing education is not isolated and irrelevant in a changing world.

Re-imaging housing learning for the future

DMU is also increasingly looking outside the traditional model of a housing course. In response to evidence from housing employers, we see a future in credit accumulation models where students may take a longer period of time to build up bite-size modules of learning which reflect the shape of their changing career and the changing needs of the organisations for which they work. This is something that CIH should look at in more detail too so that practitioners who already have CIHCM might build on their learning through accredited bite-size mini modules developed by HEIs but which might link to a framework of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) with CIH.

Employers tend to come to us with ideas for skills and learning that they need in their organisation and we can respond to that in a number of ways. For example, in 2012 I delivered a series of workshops for a housing association in the East Midlands on ‘Customer Insight for Tailored Services’ which was linked to my book for the CIH.\(^8\) There was a discussion on whether this programme needed to be formally accredited so that students would gain University credits, but that was not seen to be of primary importance; although for one of the housing professionals we are looking at developing the experience undertaken so far into a more formal module which will attract credits upon completion. The training programme consisted of one seminar which was delivered to all staff, followed by four further sessions delivered to a selection of customer insight ‘champions’ in the organisation. An important feature of the programme was that it focused on projects, such as organisational response to welfare reform. Data from the organisation was used to create insight which students then used to make a proposal for a particular project or scheme that would help the organisation deliver great customer service. The feedback from participants at the end of the programme was very positive, for example ‘I can see the challenges facing the
organisation in better focus.’ and ‘it made me think about solutions a bit more than I would have done!’

This latter comment is, I think, particularly key – learning centres in partnership with housing employers want to empower students to assess challenges, research options, but also to become problem-solvers too.

Housing organisations are looking for flexible education solutions, such as through bespoke courses developed in partnership with HEIs. Some organisations are collaborating with others and developing academies to provide training directly relevant to member organisations. These can be created on a social enterprise basis and provide training and skills to employees across the organisation, and perhaps to tenants too as part of housing and employment programmes.

There is room for a range of models in housing education in the future and the role of the learning centre in helping to provide the scaffolding on which to build programmes of learning is important as there is a wealth of expertise in teaching and learning as well as subject knowledge. It is important that housing organisations utilise the learning from individuals in a smarter way, in order to avoid ‘organisational amnesia’ and to get the best value for the organisation and the housing customer out of the investments made in housing education.

We are living in an age of ‘big data’ – this means that we are dealing with extremely large sets of information that, unless we manage the ways data is collected and analysed it can be too much to be actively useful. The amount of information that we collect, not just as housing organisations, but across business, government and society, is phenomenal; it has been suggested that digital data is growing by approximately 60 per cent per annum.9

However, data is not the same as insight. We need to connect the dots between data sets across sectors in order to understand our housing customers better so as to respond to the pressures of the current tough environment. Organisations need to think about a ‘big data’ plan,10 so that in these challenging times they can turn information into customer insight. HEIs providing housing education to equip professionals for the future should think about the challenges for ‘big data’. Whilst it is not proposed that all housing lecturers will become computer analytics experts and statisticians, the principle of enabling students to see the bigger picture, to connect the dots, must be at the heart of what we do.
Conclusion

As for the future of housing learning in a tough environment – learning centres need to continue to be flexible, to partner with housing organisations and find out what exactly they need and how they want that delivering. To be viable for the future educators cannot wait for students to come to colleges and universities to follow a standard programme of learning. Of course there are issues of quality and standards that learning centres need to uphold, but this can still be achieved in taking the learning out of the institution and directly into housing organisations through face-to-face programmes, or supported online learning.

The subject skills required by housing professionals will always be subject to change. A spoof advert used in an article in CIH’s Housing magazine back in October 1999 alluded to the seemingly ever changing and expanding skills needed by housing professionals:11

WANTED positive and enthusiastic team worker for job in housing

Customer service background and knowledge of financial markets desirable. Experience of project and risk management required. Capacity to fulfil ambitious government plans for urban regeneration essential. Professional qualification encompassing knowledge of law, debt counselling, rent valuation, basic planning, construction, people management, environmental health...

As centres for housing learning we will continue to keep students updated on the latest topic changes, but it is our role in empowering students through the use of learning as scaffolding, to be built upon in order to reflect the new skills required by housing organisations, that should be the bigger focus.

Key points

• Housing educators need to be flexible in the way they provide the ‘scaffolding’ for students to tailor their own learning.

• There should continue to be dialogue between housing educators, employers and the professional body to ensure the needs of the industry are reflected in the curriculum and assessment regime.
• Education programmes can be flexible, adaptable and bespoke for particular organisations. DMU, for example, works with a number of housing employers to establish what their organisational learning needs are and to respond to those needs.

• We all need to make the links and to be more savvy with connecting large amounts of data to create insight.

• Whilst there is a large amount of change in the industry, and the challenges we face in tough times are not insignificant, the housing profession is resilient, is used to change, and can draw on a wealth of skills and capacity.
Summary

Putting customers at the heart of a service and responding effectively to their needs requires a combination of different organisational initiatives and actions. This ranges from a customer focused sense of purpose, to how people think about the design of work; and clarity around organisational values. Staff development is a key foundation block that underpins an organisation’s aspirations and it can be instrumental in helping to deliver these aspirations on the ground.

At Incommunities, we have been giving a great deal of thought to what we prioritise in terms of staff development. We have concluded that we should put the greatest investment into developing technical mastery and aligning this to organisational values. In combination with a systems thinking approach to the design of work, we feel that good customer service is an outcome of this focused approach rather than a specific skill in itself.

Skills for the future – what do we need?

There has been a lot of debate in the housing industry about the skills, knowledge and behaviours needed in the modern housing service. There is some focus on developing a set of behaviours or soft competencies expected of the role, I hear talk of ‘a new type of housing officer’ and ‘a different skill set from the past’. There have been some very high profile customer service initiatives credited with improving the customer experience in some major organisations.

What I do not hear much about is the combination of alignment of staff to the organisation’s values and the development of harder technical knowledge: what I have termed ‘mastery’ in this article. The housing industry needs to pay as much, if not more, attention to developing technical mastery as we have done over the past few years to softer people skills.

A lack of focus on technical skills can lead to wasteful and bureaucratic work practices with staff becoming bogged-down and disempowered. As a consequence, whilst
customers may deal with staff who have excellent people skills, the customer journey will become more complex and frustrating if staff do not know how to deal with the customer’s situation correctly or how to adapt their response to the customer’s own unique circumstances. This outcome is the opposite of what I’m sure most housing organisations are aiming to achieve in their approach to effective customer service.

The housing service is delivered in the context of a complex legislative framework. Housing officers are responsible for advising and assisting customers about their tenancies, benefits and sometimes general law in relation to anti-social behaviour, hate crime and relationship breakdown. They are also increasingly dealing with aspects of the care system and the law surrounding vulnerability and capacity. In my opinion and experience, staff need hard technical knowledge as a basic foundation block so that an effective service results. Good customer care is more likely to result, and at the first point of contact.

I believe that if staff don’t have the right technical knowledge a number of negative consequences can follow:

- There are a number of mistakes made that lead to complaints.
- The organisation reacts by developing comprehensive policies and procedures, flow charts, etc; and it designs computer systems that aim to ensure that procedures are followed correctly.
- Staff are monitored for compliance with policies and procedures and consistency.
- Staff stop or fail to make empowered decisions at the front line: every case of a certain class is treated in the same way despite the circumstances being different on each occasion. Sometimes people lose sight of why they are doing things because they are so focused on the process. They forget the principles of what they are doing.
- Team-leaders and supervisors become the focus of advice and guidance for staff because they are expected to authorise and check casework.
- Staff are less able to make a clear contribution to the development of practice other than to say when things go wrong; and as a result policy is seen as a specialist function and top-down.

This all looks fine to an auditor, but the customer will experience a rigid, bureaucratic ‘script like’ response and delays in getting answers and decisions will ensue because issues are referred upwards or await authorisation. Sometimes the response does not deal completely with the customer’s individual circumstances.
My view is that, alongside establishing the purpose of actions and the principles behind them, we need to increase the hard technical knowledge base of housing staff and be less prescriptive about process. This will allow staff to use their judgement to deal with the variety of circumstances that customers present. It will help them to manage risk and to find creative solutions that fit the needs of the customer as opposed to consistently applying the same procedure to everyone on every occasion.

Many organisations have also made the customer journey more complex by designing the service on the false assumption that the majority of issues are simple and can be dealt with by an unqualified and often undeveloped front line; leaving the more complex issues to be handed over to fewer more experienced officers. In fact I suspect that few issues are ever that simple, and a lack of technical knowledge makes even the most simple issues complex.

**What do your staff actually know?**

I am not sure that many organisations routinely evaluate the true knowledge base of their existing staff and instead have developed their practice along the lines outlined above. I am arguing that we need to firstly evidence what our existing staff actually know, and develop training that delivers on the technical gaps. Extensive recruitment of people with the ‘right behaviours and attitudes’ without a programme in place to develop their technical knowledge will compound the problem. Even the recruitment of graduates needs some form of follow-up training and development focusing on the development of technical knowledge.

This is a challenge however when we look at the knowledge of existing teams and how this can be raised over time. Historically, the CIH professional qualification leading to full Chartered Membership of CIH has been seen as a long and intensive programme (reflective in size and duration with many analogous programmes leading to membership of professional bodies operating in the built environment and community sectors). Uptake of programmes leading to CIHCM is not universal. It is not routinely asked for as an essential requirement for front line staff at recruitment and if it were I’m sure that many organisations would rapidly find themselves with a recruitment crisis. A majority of organisations cannot afford to send large numbers of staff on this qualification in any one year both in terms of cash or time. This situation has been made worse in recent years by hikes in tuition fees. On the other hand, few induction programmes or day training courses ever get past the basics. The extent to which staff understand or can apply the learning from these courses is probably not routinely or independently evaluated, except perhaps by increasing scrutiny by managers.
Learning and skills development at Incommunities

In response to this Incommunities has embarked on a number of projects that will address learning and skills development. We signed a skills pledge to bring everyone we employ to at least a Level 2 NVQ, (equivalent to GCSE Grades A to C) in their area of work. We carried out a skills audit of existing staff to test the extent of the technical knowledge gap and as a result we have developed a parallel programme of an NVQ/housing certificate with a focus on housing and related law. The qualification is accredited by CIH. It uses live case studies; and staff are evaluated at every stage. It also includes critical evaluation of policy and practice to enable staff to contribute to the development of practice within the organisation. NVQs are an approach that fit flexibly between CIH qualifications and the basic day to day training programme. This approach enables existing staff to learn in groups. This approach can be evaluated, accredited and can provide learning credit for accredited CIH qualifications.

The programme has been developed to balance tutor led input (teaching) and experiential learning (doing). This approach will enable more experienced and knowledgeable officers to demonstrate their knowledge and their less experienced colleagues to expand their practical knowledge. In time experienced and novice officers will raise and improve their level of housing specific knowledge, their legal understanding and they will transfer this knowledge to their work.

The investment is substantial from both sides. It requires a strong financial commitment to the programme, a significant time investment and the support from leaders and managers. It also requires the commitment of staff which has helped make it happen. The programme has been developed in conjunction with Dutton Fisher and Associates (a housing specific education and training provider), and KeyHouse (an organisation with a strong legal team); and input from leaders within the business to ensure that knowledge levels increase across the organisation and that learning directly benefits our customers.

We have faced some initial teething problems with the programme as it quickly became clear that this was a big ask of staff on top of their workloads. Many staff, who have not been in education for some time, were very anxious about going through a process involving evaluation. However, as people have moved through the programme and received good grades for their first assignments, we are finding that people are now able to apply their enhanced knowledge to every day work situations and are becoming better able to meet our customer needs.
Supporting graduate mentoring

Many organisations have sought to upskill their workforce through appointing graduates. We are also addressing the development we give to graduates who are seeking a career in housing with our graduate employment mentoring scheme, (GEMs). The GEM Programme is an internship programme based on whole person learning. The programme enables students to be carefully selected for values and behaviours which are aligned with the values of the partners who provide internships. Students also enter into a twelve month period of experiential learning which challenge their problem solving, personal development and influencing skills. Workplace mentors are trained by the Centre for Partnership to help students in their workplace learning. As an accredited CIH centre, the Centre for Partnership provides cognitive learning in the form of six residential academies which allow the graduates to convert their degrees to CIH qualifications and membership. Finally, the GEM students are prepared as tomorrow’s leaders with intensive personal and leadership development support including the use of assessment centres, psychometric assessment and feedback. Group projects are also introduced to develop the learners’ team-working skills.

From ‘good to great’ and systems thinking

Underpinning our philosophy and practice, Incommunities has adopted the Collins framework in ‘good to great’ plus systems thinking. This has been central to developing the Incommunities Building Blocks of Leadership. This model is an important development for us in two ways. Firstly the Building Blocks model is being used to assess all of our staff teams’ alignment with the values of Incommunities. Secondly the Building Blocks model recognises the pivotal role of managers in educating and developing their teams. We are confident that this twin focus on values and technical mastery, plus the leaders’ critical role in developing staff, will deliver a true customer focus to our service, as well as effectiveness and efficiency. The GEM and CIH certificate programmes are already delivering returns and we are confident our approach will be a worthwhile investment for staff.
Key points

• At Incommunities we have embarked on a journey where individual development focuses on alignment of organisational values with technical mastery to build capacity and capability in our teams.

• Consistency of action and strict adherence to procedure is less important to us than the ability of our staff to handle the variety of needs and expectations that customers present. For this they need to be able to apply consistent principles and use sound judgement.

• Improving technical knowledge of housing and other relevant areas means that staff will be able to deal with a broad range of issues with confidence.

• For existing staff we have undertaken thorough assessment of knowledge and skills before designing our training and development programme.

• For graduates, we have taken a whole person development approach that also covers the technical mastery needed for working in the housing industry.

• We are working closely with partners such as the Centre for Partnerships, Dutton Fisher and Associates and CIH to develop accredited training programmes.

• Underpinning all of this is the framework of Collins ‘good to great’ and systems thinking. Amongst other things this highlights the role of managers and leaders in developing capacity and capability within the organisation and we are focusing on this in our leadership development programme.

• For us, good customer service is an outcome of good design, the right values and the building of capability; it is not necessarily a skill in itself.
Housing skills and learning in a new health and social care landscape

By Jeremy Porteus, Director of the Housing Learning and Improvement Network and a Knowledge Transfer Fellow at Oxford Brookes University

Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the new health and social care landscape. It outlines what new skills and learning are needed to play an active role within local health and social care economies. Above all, it highlights what skills are needed to respond to new funding and commissioning arrangements to enable vulnerable and older people to live well at home. For example, designing, commissioning and delivering personalised services; managing change at a time of budget pressures; and improving participation and co-production to ensure that service users’ needs and aspirations are at the heart of good quality housing, care and support. Finally, it calls for greater cross-sector leadership to help construct partnerships that can transform local homes and communities.

The key new organisations and systems in health and social care

Clinical commissioning groups – The 211 clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) replaced primary care trusts from April 2013. They commission the majority of services for community and secondary care, including community health and acute care.

Public health commissioning and local authorities – Local authorities are now responsible for the commissioning of most local public health activity, under the leadership of public health directors – doctors who have moved from the NHS.

Health and wellbeing boards – These boards, sited within top-tier or unitary authorities, are charged with providing strategic leadership to efforts aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of their communities. Formal duties include the preparation of joint strategic needs assessments and joint health and wellbeing strategies. They should be inclusive in engaging with service users, patients and the public. Their broad powers include encouraging close working between commissioners of health-related services (such as housing) and commissioners of health and social care services.
Housing skills and learning in a new health and social care landscape

The NHS Health and Social Care Act 2012 dramatically changed the context in which housing commissioners and providers operate. These legislative changes come on top of a continuing expectation to deliver personalised services centred on the individual, as recently set out in the Care Bill.12

Health and wellbeing boards (HWBs) are an important new forum that senior housing managers and policymakers should seek to influence. The boards can influence and make links across health, social care and housing.

I consider that they can also greatly encourage and support new and innovative partnerships that deliver an integrated and personalised system of health and social care locally – a system that incorporates housing.

HWBs have been prioritising different housing services and functions in their early days, reflecting the breadth of the impact that housing can have on the health and wellbeing of our communities. However, this disparity also underlines the need for a coherent effort by housing providers and commissioners to inform and influence their HWB.

It is up to the housing industry’s leaders to build an evidence base, reinforced by a skilled workforce, and to develop the lobbying skills that will persuade the HWB of the effectiveness of housing-related services. We should be highlighting the potential cost savings for acute health services and the wider health and care system.

However, the barriers are significant: including the clinically-led nature of the health service, with its focus on the medical model. There are political, professional and organisational barriers to diverting budgets from acute to preventative measures such as improved housing and appropriate housing services and support.

As this publication was going to press, NHS England was working on a health and housing ‘Partnership Agreement’ which also embraces social care. Being developed in co-operation with organisations including the Housing Learning and Improvement Network (Housing LIN) and CIH, the agreement will set out how the sectors can work together effectively for the benefit of patients, tenants and residents.

Housing leaders must embrace and use this compact when it comes out.
Understanding our ageing population and the housing options open to them

The number of people aged over 65 across the UK is expected to rise from 10.3 million in 2010 to 16.9 million by 2035.\textsuperscript{13}

Housing teams need a comprehensive overview of the services and options available to those in both general needs and specialist housing. The average age of social housing tenants is rising. Nearly one in three tenants are over 65 and of those, more than half live in general needs housing.

What do these people want from the services they receive now and in the future? How can the housing industry offer more flexibility and choice within the existing stock?

Only five per cent of all older people live in specialist housing, including extra care housing and sheltered housing, and not all of the stock is fit for purpose.

In addition, the recent English Housing Survey revealed that 58 per cent of outright homeowners are over 65 years of age. They may be in need of reasonably priced services from a trusted provider, such as a home improvement agency, to help them live independently, and/or home help or nursing services to meet increasing care and support needs at home at some point in their lives.

Staff, also need to be able to offer advice as older people and those with long term conditions make important decisions about their future housing needs and aspirations.

Partnership working/joint training in an age of personalisation

There is a pressing need for more joint training with health and social care professionals.

This will equip housing staff with the skills and knowledge to work, for example, with discharge nurses making arrangements for vulnerable adults to leave hospital. Housing workers should ensure accommodation needs are considered in discharge plans for people who might require specialist housing or aids and adaptations to their homes. In other cases, poor housing (such as housing with inadequate heating or fall hazards) may have been a factor in their hospital admission in the first place.

Joint training with occupational therapists (OTs) – who can be employed by both the NHS and local government – and with physiotherapists would also be invaluable for many housing staff working with older people and those with disabilities. There are already a few forward thinking housing organisations that employ OTs.
I firmly believe in closer partnership working. A paper produced following a joint Skills for Care and Asset Skills forum on the social care and housing workforce noted that each sector’s employees lacked knowledge about the skills and services of the other. It also pointed to ‘a lack of acknowledgement or appreciation of the crossover work that some staff do (for example, some housing officers being involved in care work)’.

Looking to HWBs to drive such co-operation, the paper suggested providing the boards with a checklist of housing, social care and health outputs and outcomes. This is something that the Housing LIN and CIH are currently working on. The paper also suggests there is an opportunity to develop ‘a hybrid role with a clear skillset’; while acknowledging this would require significant learning and development for staff to ‘build the necessary skills’. It acknowledges no suitable training for such a role currently exists.

In my view, we need to urgently develop multi-agency training across housing and social care as part of staff development, covering basic person-centred concepts.

Adapted qualifications could combine elements from existing housing and social care courses to build effective integrated learning and improvement qualifications that provide continuing professional development pathways.

Liverpool’s Healthy Homes Programme is a good example of partnership working. It refers vulnerable people to the most cost-effective and appropriate services in the statutory, community, charity and social enterprise sectors. After an annual investment of £1m, initially made by the former primary care trust, it is projected to save £55m over ten years.

In some councils the assumption of public health responsibilities has led to frontline staff, particularly housing teams, being trained in basic public health promotion. This equips those working with residents or tenants with the skills to deliver public health messages on a daily basis. Lincolnshire County Council has funded district council housing staff to undertake public health training.

Personalising services will require working with community-based organisations that employ asset-based principles. Such organisations help people fulfil their potential to improve and maintain their own health and wellbeing, collectively as well as individually. Working with those organisations will require professionals to think beyond their professional boundaries and for organisations to be flexible, open to change and to embed radically new working practices.
**Engagement**

It is equally important that our workforce is equipped to provide personalised support and housing options.

Closer working with health and social care will mean placing the individual at the centre of assessments and services by embracing genuine and on-going engagement. I have been leading the call for housing teams and leaders to become skilled in approaches such as ‘living labs’, where tenants and residents are able to continually influence service planning and delivery.17

Government expects such engagement to be part of personalised services: for example, it is built into the prospectus of the Department of Health’s new £300m Care and Support Specialised Housing Fund. Those seeking grants for new specialist housing projects will have to demonstrate wide engagement throughout the process.

For example, Knightstone Housing Association has embraced the concept of resident involvement.18 The association aimed for a resident-led approach, while building the confidence and skills of tenants to manage their own finances and communities. Its ‘ICE project’ has three strands: individual empowerment, resident involvement and community empowerment.

The association’s individual empowerment team provides support to any tenant in a range of ways, including mobility, money management, accessing education, training, employment and voluntary work; and making use of specialist services.

Staff involved in the service obviously had to gain new skills and knowledge to provide this preventative support, which reduces the need for residents to turn to statutory services.

The association encourages residents to get involved in all aspects of their homes and community and the services it provides. Again, I am aware that this has involved training staff in resident involvement.19

The association has recruited a community empowerment team to work with communities on projects such as children’s groups, English lessons and neighbourhood watch.

Indeed, providers can no longer stick to tried and tested methods but must look outside the sector to involve customers. We should be learning, for example, from the trends and expectations in the NHS where the service focus is on the patient journey rather than just feedback at the end of a process.
A networked approach

There is no doubt in my mind that with the rise of personal budgets and more self-funders, providers and commissioners will have to look increasingly at models of co-production in which housing staff seek – and act on – the active input of service-users. Engagement has tended to focus on staff talking to a small group of residents, the well-known ‘usual suspects’. Staff should be trained to elicit customer feedback in an unobtrusive way throughout each day.

With commissioners looking for more personalised services, such ‘soft intelligence’ is a way housing providers can shape their offer to commissioners, residents or families.

Housing teams should be creative in finding a range of diverse and innovative engagement options that widen participation.

This reflects a broader need for the sector to be smarter about how it engages with services outside its immediate comfort zone.

It should look to broader forms of training to match the range of challenges and change it faces.

Here, networks can play an important role by providing breadth. For example, my own organisation, the Housing LIN, brings together housing, health and social care professionals in England who are involved in planning, commissioning, designing, funding, building and managing housing with care for older people. It is a cost-effective way of connecting people, ideas and resources. The Housing LIN offers discussion boards, regional networking, key learning resources and information on integrated approaches to housing with care – as well as working with the Department of Health in co-ordinating information and knowledge exchange.

Our partners in health have recognised the power of networks.

The engagement skills that are vital in the housing sector, particularly specialist housing, can also help care and support staff reach out to people with such needs in the community. For example, extra care housing schemes are now increasingly acting as care and support hubs for local communities.

Those working with older people should also have the skills to support and encourage their use of social media and digital technology. This can act as a powerful foil to social isolation.
Housing staff should also be, where appropriate, familiarising themselves with assistive technology, particularly telecare. Such technology offers many people the opportunity to continue to live independently.

And lastly, if housing is to work effectively with its partners, and make the case to organisations such as HWBs for policies that reflect the impact and potential of housing for both good and ill, I firmly believe that the sector needs to develop its leadership skills. There has been significant investment in leadership in both the NHS and social care over the last decade. Where is the housing industry’s equivalent of the NHS Leadership Academy?

**Key points**

- The health and social care landscape is changing and this has placed new demands on skills and learning requirements for the housing industry.
- Produce a clear vision on how your organisation can best promote the health and wellbeing needs of residents, for example, understanding your residents’ profile (age and health status) to inform local housing choices including access to accessible and adaptable properties.
- Build in sufficient staff time to ensure effective and proactive engagement with key health and social care decision-making and commissioning processes, for example, influence Health and Wellbeing Boards, Clinical Commissioning Groups, public health agenda to tackle local health inequalities or ill health.
- Demonstrate the person-centred outcomes of your services and provide evidence of their effectiveness, for example, your services can prevent, reduce or delay more costly care interventions or hospital admissions/readmissions.
- Develop joint training, workforce or leadership programmes to break down cultural and/or organisation boundaries, for example, use of language, understanding clinical care pathways around long term conditions management such as dementia.
- Get involved in networks locally that can help you share good practice, develop your learning and enable you to acquire relevant knowledge or key skills to align your work across more integrated housing, health and social care systems.
Adult safeguarding – the need for all staff to engage

By Imogen Parry, Independent safeguarding adults consultant and trainer for the housing industry

**Summary**

Adult safeguarding is about to become statutory, with implications for housing providers. Safeguarding Adults Boards and Safeguarding Adults Reviews will become compulsory. Adults at risk live in all forms of social housing, not just specialist accommodation. There are many links between safeguarding and other agendas. There are weak legal and regulatory incentives for housing providers to engage in safeguarding exacerbated by difficulties in partnership working. Overcoming these disincentives and problems requires: clear strategic leadership, the training of all front-line staff, participation in multi-agency partnerships, excellent tenant profiling information, the appointment of safeguarding leads, assertiveness in working with statutory agencies; and preventative approaches.

**The new legal framework for adult safeguarding**

Adult safeguarding is a relatively new activity when compared to child protection; and is very new for most housing staff. It can be defined as ‘the process of protecting adults with care and support needs from abuse or neglect’. The current non statutory framework for adult safeguarding in England will be replaced by legislation as part of the new Care Bill. Local authorities will be required to set up a Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB) in their area which must include the local authority, the NHS and the Police. Recommendations that housing representation should be included in this list were not accepted by government. However, they would ‘be most concerned if SABs did not address the role, contribution and responsibilities of housing providers in adult safeguarding’.

Local authorities will be required, under the Care Bill, to make enquiries, or ask others to make enquiries, when they think an adult with care and support needs may be at risk of abuse or neglect in their area and to find out what, if any, action may be needed. Safeguarding Adults Reviews (SARs), replacing Serious Case Reviews (SCRs), must be arranged if an adult with care and support needs dies as a result of abuse or neglect and there is concern about how one of the members of the SAB acted.
The role of housing staff in adult safeguarding

Public awareness of the extent, and often horrific nature, of adult abuse has been raised in the last two years following the broadcast of the Panorama programme on Winterbourne View (in which people with learning disabilities and challenging behaviour were tortured by staff in a private hospital) and the Francis report on neglect and abuse in mid Staffordshire hospital. My own research on lessons for housing providers from adult SCRs identified 19 social housing tenants who died due to abuse or neglect. This highlighted the vital need for all housing staff to pick up on the signs of abuse and to have comprehensive databases. Housing providers need to ensure that they have ‘appropriate policies and procedures in place to help prevent, detect and deal with abuse. These policies should apply to all tenants at risk of harm, not just those living in sheltered, extra care and supported housing due to the increasing numbers of adults at risk living in general needs housing’. Adult safeguarding also links with other agendas including anti-social behaviour, hate and crime reduction, domestic abuse, health and wellbeing.

Barriers to effective involvement of housing staff in adult safeguarding

Despite the demographic and moral arguments for the engagement of housing staff in adult safeguarding, the legal and regulatory incentives are weak. Sheltered and supported housing staff working under Supporting People (SP) contracts were required to have training on safeguarding but this is reducing due to the removal of ring-fencing of SP funding and successive funding cuts. The Care Bill fails to address my concerns that ‘the role of housing in preventing and addressing adult abuse is neglected in legislation, policy, practice and research’. Recommendations by the joint parliamentary report in March 2013 that housing should be included in clauses on information and advice, partners, SABs, integration, hospital discharge and assessment were rejected by the government. Recently, however, we have been told that, in the last three of these topics, housing will be addressed in guidance.

The other most significant barrier to the engagement of housing staff in adult safeguarding is the long-standing difficulty inherent in partnership working. ‘Nearly all SCR investigations highlight a breakdown in partnership working as a key factor in failing to keep people safe’. The Annual Report 2011/12 of Luton SAB includes ‘lack of effective communication across agencies’ as one of a number of key themes arising from national SCRs. Penhale’s research on partnership arrangements in adult protection is particularly helpful in understanding the reasons for these problems: ‘Barriers to partnership working in safeguarding work included: lack of commitment; insufficient funding; lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities; insufficient information sharing; different priorities; (and) delays in decision making’.
Overcoming these barriers – strategically and operationally

Senior managers must demonstrate clear strategic leadership and ‘own’ safeguarding, ensuring that it is ‘everyone’s business’. As Domini Gunn, Director of Health and Wellbeing at CIH has said: ‘The commitment to child and adult safeguarding is too often agreed at a senior level in commissioning and service provider organisations but it is not then systematically, consistently and continuously reinforced, monitored and reported at the front line where it matters most’.33

At the very least, senior staff should ensure that all front-line staff are trained to recognise the signs of abuse and know how to report concerns, despite the lack of regulatory requirement to do so. Recent good practice examples include safeguarding training for maintenance staff (Adactus, Greater Manchester), refuse collectors (North Tyneside council); and gas servicing staff and others (Coast and County, Redcar).34

Senior staff should ensure that other ‘anti-crime’ agendas are linked to adult safeguarding via policies and practice. They should ensure that there is housing representation on the local SAB, Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)35 and Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA).36 Housing organisations working across large geographical areas should nominate senior representatives for these strategic groups ensuring structures are in place enabling effective information flow in both directions. The particular problems for securing housing representation on SABs in two tier authorities should be addressed.

Senior managers must ensure that databases of tenants record vulnerability and that preventative work targets tenants with a high number of recorded vulnerability factors. Tenants with particularly complex needs or challenging behaviour will require the support of staff who have received specialist training.

Adult safeguarding can be extremely complex, raising a range of ethical, legal, political, policy and practice issues that defy over-simplification. Safeguarding leads within each housing organisation should therefore be appointed, taking responsibility for the development and review of policies, procedures and training for all levels of staff and Board members. The leads can ensure that national and local lessons from SCRs/SARs are disseminated via training and other fora, including through multi-agency training. As it is likely that housing organisations will increasingly be asked by ASC to conduct their own investigations into adult abuse, housing provider safeguarding specialists could take the lead with this activity. These leads can act as specialist advisors on cases, monitor referrals and assist managers with multi-agency working difficulties.
All staff need to be familiar with their own adult safeguarding policies, their local multi-agency policies on adult safeguarding and the Social Care Institute for Excellence materials on adult safeguarding. They also need to understand the principles and implications of the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and the Human Rights Act 1998. Staff at all levels will need to enhance their assertiveness and other skills in working with professionals from other disciplines, in particular, to work to change negative attitudes towards housing.

Jeremy Porteus’ article (above) comments on the lack of knowledge that different sectors have about the skills and services of each other. My own research on lessons for housing providers from adult SCRs pointed to negative attitudes by ASC staff being a contributory factor in the exclusion of housing from partnership working and information sharing. Senior staff will need to be prepared to intervene more frequently, on behalf of junior staff, in the event of poor responses to referrals, exclusion from strategy meetings, delays in safeguarding investigations, failures in sharing information, unclear monitoring arrangements and disagreements about definitions of vulnerability.

The following tips may help housing providers develop proactive approaches and form a checklist which can inform learning on the ground:

If staff are told that the alert or referral cannot be accepted (as it doesn’t meet their referral threshold or their definitions of abuse or vulnerable adult/adult at risk), consider the following points:

- Check what their policy says on alert and referral criteria and definitions. Is their interpretation open for discussion?
- Reconsider the facts of your referral – have you left something out and/or underestimated/downplayed the risks?
- Ask if they have a mechanism for gathering information on apparently low level cases, especially where there is an emerging pattern of referrals.
- Ask for advice on how to handle the situation yourself or via other agencies.
- If the case is not accepted and investigated, refer again if circumstances and risks change.

If staff are told ‘it is the person’s choice’ (for example, to refuse services or intervention) or that ‘they have capacity and the right to make unwise decisions’ consider the following points:
• Was the person coerced?
• Is anyone else at risk?
• Has there been a proper and recent capacity assessment on this issue?
• Could there be an over-riding duty of care?
• Has the person been accurately and recently diagnosed (for example, with a learning disability or mental health issues) and risk assessed? Particular attention should be paid if their circumstances have deteriorated and/or their needs have increased or are very complex and/or there is a sudden change in behaviour which could indicate an escalating problem.

Preventative approaches to safeguarding will be increasingly necessary, given the likelihood of increasing numbers of frail and vulnerable tenants. Sheltered housing schemes are ideally suited to taking part in the World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, involving not only tenants, but older and vulnerable people from the wider community.

Key points

• More involvement by all housing staff in adult safeguarding is vital due to increasing levels of vulnerability of tenants in all types of social housing.
• To make this involvement effective, all staff must be trained and receive specialist support from safeguarding leads employed by housing providers.
• Senior managers must engage in SABs, MARAC, MAPPA and other fora.
• Special efforts must be made to overcome inherent joint working issues with adult social care.
• Tenant profiling and preventative approaches are vital.
Meeting the skills challenge of the residential property management sector

By Bob Keats, Examiner for the IRPM and Jeff Platt, Chief Executive of the IRPM

Summary

Over the past ten years residential property managers have seen the professionalisation of their activity. With this has come rising management standards for clients and customers alike. Landlord and tenant law is different for long leaseholders with variable service charges so the use of knowledge and the ability to apply that knowledge in a competitive environment is essential. The IRPM provides the credentials for experienced and well-trained property managers. The wider housing industry can learn from the experiences of the residential property management sector in terms of customer engagement and service quality.

The IRPM at Ten

The Institute of Residential Property Management (IRPM) is ten years old. It was incorporated at the end of 2002 and now the new professional association has grown to almost 3,000 members. It holds a niche position in the existing framework of professional associations which includes RICS and CIH and it sits between the two: RICS focuses on property; and in addition to bricks and mortar CIH embraces wider community dimensions. The IRPM links both of these for the management of leasehold blocks.

In those ten years the economy has swung from boom to bust and those investing at the height of the market have struggled, many others have done very well. There have been leaseholders right back to the middle ages, but leasehold flats are a more recent, twentieth century phenomenon. High rise and high density living in our urban centres has now created almost two million leasehold flats in England and Wales and the common parts of these buildings need managing. Some blocks are managed collectively by groups of leaseholders, some managed by individual landlords and some by managing agents. The picture more recently has been complicated by mixed tenure developments encouraged by S106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, so now there are leaseholders, investors, social housing tenants and private sector tenants living side by side.
Leaseholders see themselves on a par with owner occupiers but they are legally tenants (and their occupation is governed by Landlord and Tenant Acts). They don’t own the building but they have permission to occupy their flats for a long term. Some may have bought a flat that entitles them, along with other leaseholders, to a share in a management company that runs the block on a day-by-day basis. Some have bought just a part share (shared ownership). After the Housing Act 1996 introduced Assured Shorthold Tenancies, the finance companies made buy-to-let mortgages readily available and so many investors have bought leasehold flats to sublet to weekly subtenants. Whatever the demographics of the building the landlord’s interest, the asset and the common parts, needs managing. This is the work of the residential property manager.

**Seeing the whole of the moon**

There’s an old rock ballad by The Water Boys called ‘Whole of the Moon’ a love song about the singer’s partner seeing the bigger picture. The lyrics written by Mike Scott present the story like this (from the second verse):

‘I was grounded
While you filled the skies
I was dumbfounded by truth
You cut through lies
I saw the rain dirty valley
You saw Brigadoon
I saw the crescent
You saw the whole of the moon.’

It is a fitting song for the residential property manager working in the modern context where perhaps they are the only ones to see the bigger picture. The land owner, developer, lease drafter, sales agent, conveyancing solicitor and the leaseholder only see the crescents – it’s only the property manager that sees the whole of the moon.

The management of leasehold blocks is different from that of social housing. Landlord’s can manage their buildings in many different ways but if they want to be able to recharge the cost of services back onto the leaseholders, through the service charge provisions in the lease, then they are bound by a raft of legislation and separate codes of practice. Block management is not a ‘one size fits all’ approach. Some landlords have IT systems that are ‘top down’ covering their whole property portfolio. The good block managers have systems that work from the ‘bottom up’ so that each leaseholder is seen as an individual customer.
Skills for the residential property management sector

So who are these block managers and what skills do they need to perform their role? What, if any, are the wider transferable skills which a diversifying housing industry can learn from?

The IRPM was created from the need to recognise the professional skills of residential property managers and it set out to offer access to the professional body through examination in 2004. There is a detailed syllabus (updated in 2007 and 2012) that has been widened to reflect the specialisms within the profession. There is access to a raft of learning materials that is regularly updated in the light of changing regulations and court interpretations. The IRPM has examinations at Foundation, Associate and Member level. The new syllabus has six sections covering: legal framework, general property management, technical building and surveying, accounting for service charges, affordable housing and personal development.

Residential property managers need to be able to provide a management service that responds to the needs of their client (usually the landlord), their customers (leaseholders) and the wide range of other parties that are needed to maintain the building: including insurance, contractors, cleaners, gardeners and technical specialists. Many managing agents see that progression for their staff through the IRPM exams to Member level gives a competitive advantage in securing new business. As a result some 300 new managers took the Foundation level exam in the Autumn of 2012. Over 200 passed into full membership in the year.

To some extent the professional students are self-selecting. It takes a certain kind of person to be able to respond to a crisis at the end of long working day and to keep smiling, to understand the needs and aspirations of their customers, to perform their work on time and on budget; and to meet the required standards. It is difficult for leaseholders to acquire these skills. It is also difficult to transfer skills and knowledge to learners. Competencies are difficult to define and practical knowledge, learned through experience, is not easily transferable. Just when the requirements for learning and the ground rules for practice become clear the expectations of good practice can shift.

By way of illustration, two recent court cases (i) Phillips and Goddard v Francis and (ii) Daejan Investments v Benson show that the courts are capable of interpreting legislation and regulation in a way that makes efficient residential property management more difficult. The first case overturned 25 years of practice on the financial limits required for

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leaseholder consultation and the second undermined the established need for consultation itself. It is a challenge to the profession to respond effectively to these external interventions. This requires a dynamic and flexible approach to skills development and learning; qualities which are increasingly characterising skills and learning in the wider housing industry.

**Lessons for the wider housing industry as it engages with private sector management**

There is considerable debate in the housing industry about the degree to which providers who can trace their origins to philanthropic or social roots should now actively diversify their portfolios to include a substantial private rented element. To what extent does diversification into the private rented sector assist or impede the pursuit of social value in property management?

It is significant that Landlord and Tenant Acts in 1985 and 1987 and the leasehold reforms in Acts of Parliament in 1993 and 2002 were themselves efforts to curb landlord excesses and provide consumer protection. This focus on the customer experience shows that the *person* as well as the *property* has also been a feature of residential property management. While some private sector managing agents today have had a pretty rough ride in the popular press due to deficiencies in their services to the customer, the broader picture can be very different; and the managing agents we know try very hard to provide a good customer service with a strong focus on value for money.

These aspirations increasingly typify the service objectives of social housing providers. There are exceptions, but the residential property management sector has cleaned up its act beyond recognition in the past ten years. The term ‘private’ does not signify different management approaches. Major social housing providers supplement their social drivers with commercial acumen (Montague 2012).³⁹

In March 2013 the country’s largest social landlord, *Places for People*, bought up a major property management company, RMG. There is no fundamental clash of ethos or values but rather a sharing of expertise. The private sector requirements for performance fit well with the social mission of providing support for those in need of specialist services. We have worked with a so called mixed economy since the 1970s and the current mixed tenure patterns on new developments merely continue to reflect the diversity of high density living.
Skills for the future

And what of the future? For the IRPM, a professional association that has built its membership to 3000 members in a little over ten years, there are challenges and opportunities for the longer term. There are partnerships for professional practice in the offing to further develop the skills set of the membership. RICS have offered a pathway to further development through their associate membership. There is also much common ground with CIH. IRPM professionals can operate as small and medium size enterprises or they work for the big managing agents. There are opportunities to specialise and for businesses to grow. The work of the property manager has traditionally been protected from the boom and bust cycle (there is always a need to manage property irrespective of the economy); but will it last? Well, given that modern leases are for 999 years and the 1993 Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act enshrined into statute the right for a leaseholder to be granted a 90 year lease extension it seems that the work of the professional residential property manager will continue. Indeed, the managing agent companies now established might end up being some of the longest running companies ever seen.

Key points

- Leasehold residential property managers have professionalised in the past ten years.
- Leasehold property management has its own legal framework.
- Property managers must know the law to ensure proper collection of service charges and provision of management services.
- Increasingly, the skills of the residential property manager and the social housing manager are intersecting as the housing industry diversifies and social landlords are seeking to engage with the private rented sector.
- The housing industry of the future will require business and commercial skills coupled with systems to manage a diverse customer base and provide diverse services in a cost-effective way.
- Mixed tenure management requires knowledgeable and nimble responses and the need for flexibility and adaptability.
Leading Places of Change – skills and learning challenges for the homelessness sector now and in the future

By Helen Giles, Managing Director of Broadway’s Real People HR consultancy, and HR Director of Broadway Homelessness & Support

Summary

Both the operating environment and service provision models for providers of homeless services have become increasingly complex. Leadership skills are essential if providers are to navigate these challenges and remain sustainable and relevant. Underinvestment in leadership skills has been a cross-sector challenge. For the homelessness sector the Leading Places of Change (LPoC) Programme has been significant in plugging the skills gap. This article will also explore how homelessness service providers and LPoC need to evolve to deal with emerging challenges and skills needs.

The changing operational context for homelessness services

The operating environment for providers of homelessness services has become increasingly tough over recent years. This is a direct result of the decreasing amount of public money available to deal with growing demand. As the public purse gets squeezed further, the operating context will become increasingly challenging and this will present new demands on the skills and learning needs of people working in the sector.

As the funding climate has toughened, the volume and complexity of service user needs and the desire of statutory authorities to find new solutions to entrenched problems has created a much broader spectrum of different approaches and opportunities. This has made the shape of service provision a more complex mosaic than was the case in the days when we were essentially providing outreach, hostels and supported housing on service models that had not changed radically for at least two decades.

The leadership challenges faced by managers in the homelessness sector today and tomorrow are incredibly demanding. Unless they acquire the necessary skills to adapt in a changing environment, they will lose credibility with purchasers and funders, risk forfeiting existing contracts; and fail to win sufficient new business to survive. Sadly this has already been the fate of some providers who have not been flexible enough to adapt to a changing world.
These challenges include the following:

- Increasing volume and complexity of service user needs, which are now compounded by the impact of welfare reforms.

- The need to stay ahead of diverse and sophisticated models of intervention to support clients with mental health, substance misuse and other complex needs.

- The personalisation agenda. This is not only about enabling clients to purchase services that are tailored to their individual needs, but involves a much more fundamental readjustment to thinking about service delivery. This will bring about co-production and the involvement of service-users as active partners in the design of services.

- Fierce competition for service contracts, with more and more private sector providers entering the market.

- Public spending cuts driving local authority commissioners to tip the balance ever more towards price when awarding contracts and to demand further price reductions mid-contract. This represents a never-ending need to do more with fewer resources.

- Managing greater financial risks associated with changes to the ways in which services are commissioned and paid for: for example, ‘payment by results’ contracts.

- A high level of job insecurity, organisational upheaval and service reconfigurations as a result of the frequency of re-tendering of service contracts by local authorities.

- The ability to recruit and motivate good staff, which is severely compromised by the steep downwards trend in wages and terms and conditions for front-line staff.

**What LPoC has achieved**

In a sector where traditionally interest and investment in leadership and management skills has been comparatively weak, LPoC has plugged a huge gap. It has played a major role in equipping participants with the understanding and skills needed to address the challenges faced by the sector over the past few years.

Initially, most of those taking up the LPoC programme were senior managers, including CEOs of smaller charities. Over the past few years more organisations have been sponsoring their middle and junior managers to undertake the programme. This is a very healthy trend as it has enabled participating organisations to nurture effective leadership behaviours from early on in an employee’s management career.
There has been a wealth of cross-sector management research revealing a widespread paucity of leadership capability in the UK. This has also highlighted the fact that many people tend to acquire necessary skills far too late in their careers. Typically, people are promoted to management roles on the basis of their technical competence without any pre-assessment of their interest in and potential to lead and coach others. Then they are given little or no training to do so once in role.

A Yougov survey of senior HR professionals conducted in 2011\textsuperscript{40} found that only 60 per cent of them had confidence in their line manager’s ability to deal with the people management tasks delegated to them. In 2011 an independent Xpert HR study on managing underperformance showed that six employers in 10 did not believe their managers were confident and competent in managing performance!

The results of failings in leadership for organisations operating in the sphere of care and support have been revealed all too tragically by findings such as those arising from the public inquiry into events at the Mid Staffordshire NHS Trust Foundation.

LPoC has achieved a range of holistic outcomes. It has given managers the skills and knowledge to shape services that are safe, of high quality and are sustainable in the longer term. It has also enabled good practice sharing in a group setting to inspire new approaches. It has taught participants how to identify and select the best staff (those with genuine passion and commitment to make a difference and the capability to learn the complex skills involved in key-working with vulnerable adults). It has given managers the confidence and know-how to inspire staff and lead them through difficult changes. It has also made them fully accountable for measurable results and outcomes.

LPoC has dealt with the inspirational aspects of building positive working and service cultures in which both staff and service users feel motivated to give of their best, to learn and to grow. It has also focused on the practical implementation aspects of developing and managing great services. It has addressed the following key service delivery questions:

- How do you put together and cost a strong service bid that demonstrates what is unique about your offer?
- How do you set clear performance objectives and standards for staff?
- How do you deal with persistent intermittent or long-term staff absences?
- How do you develop effective tools for self-audits and adapt these so service users can be fully involved?
Since the start of the programme, LPoC has been kept under on-going review by CIH to ensure it maintains its relevance in the light of changes in the operating environment. The programme aims to have both the vision and flexibility to enable its adaption to the skills required to meet newly emerging challenges.

**How LPoC needs to evolve to cope with new challenges**

LPoC needs to maintain its focus on both the transactional and transformational aspects of what it takes to lead the design and delivery of excellent services. LPoC must achieve positive outcomes with and for service-users.

Managers will need strong capabilities in key areas such as:

- Project management.
- Commercial acumen.
- Financial understanding.
- Preparation of service bids.
- Assessment of client needs.
- Service design.
- Monitoring and measuring outcomes and benchmarking.

Even more importantly they will need to demonstrate the ability to listen, reflect and question their own preconceptions and assumptions to deal with the constantly changing commercial environment and commissioner demands. Managers will need to be able to assess their key strengths and be brave enough to drop older facets of their services or ways of doing things that are no longer financially sustainable or relevant.

Understanding what it takes to source, build and maintain effective working partnerships for contract delivery will be crucial. Managers will need to be able to build relationships with both purchasers and potential delivery partners to offer services and service approaches that are based on insight into and evidence of what their unique capabilities are. At the same time they must be capable of innovation, offering new models and solutions to tackle entrenched problems. They will need to keep ahead of new models of client intervention to be able to offer creative tailored solutions for individuals with varying needs rather than offering ‘one size fits all’ services based on traditional models.

They will need to be able to take a highly commercial approach to pricing services and to managing financial risk.
Managers will also need to work even harder at being visible and engaging leaders of their staff. They will need to provide a clear vision which their teams can buy into; and empower their people to navigate uncertainty. They will need to collaborate to arrive at creative solutions to situations that have become far too complex for one person to ‘manage’.

Real People and Twentysix Consulting: two consultancies working with social housing clients, ran a HR and Pay Barometer Survey in late 2012. The overwhelming people management concern for participants, in particular homelessness organisations, was anxiety about being able to recruit the right people and engage them to provide high standards of services in an environment where both pay and job security have dipped dramatically over the last decade. Managers in the sector need to develop the skills and confidence to motivate people by providing them with the kind of direction, support, coaching and empowerment that transcend pay and contractual benefits as drivers of commitment and excellence.

One trend that was in its relative infancy when LPoC began was the explosion of social media as a means of communication. Managers of homelessness services need to understand the potential of already available and emerging platforms to enhance their ability to respond to strategic challenges. The LPoC programme needs to support participants in embracing the potential of social media as a way of marketing services, sourcing staff and volunteers and using the voice of service users to influence policy and commissioner purchasing decisions.

Learning and skills for the future in a nutshell
In summary, despite a landscape of widespread job insecurity and low pay, homelessness services continue to attract great people who have an immense passion to make a difference and the cognitive and emotional intelligence to do this well. This is particularly true at entry level for those organisations that invest in people with superior levels of core competencies but little or no previous experience.

To source, develop and engage these people in the face of all the obstacles there are to recruitment and retention we need great leader-managers. The secret is to make sure they are selected for their potential to be just that rather than being automatically promoted and then to give them access to a programme of learning that exposes them to the skills and tools they need to deliver on that potential. At the heart of every great service is an excellent service manager. Conversely, no service is sustainably good if the manager is unskilled or underperforming in their role as leader of their staff team.

The creation of LPoC marked the dawning recognition of this fact among decision-makers and influencers in our sector. Since its implementation, LPoC has made a
significant contribution to the success of the homelessness sector by achieving improved service user outcomes. Although the number of people arriving on the streets continues to increase, homelessness services have collectively ensured the average length of stay has dropped very significantly. It is beyond reasonable doubt that this is because services as a whole have been far better managed, particularly in those organisations that have invested in the recruitment and development of the best staff and have been prepared to grow their own managers.

The sector now needs to shape itself to respond to the major challenges for its clients brought about by welfare reform and challenges to organisations arising through funding cuts as well as the competitive tendering regime. It also needs to seize the myriad opportunities presented by new sources of funding for certain initiatives such as health work or employment for ex-offenders and by newer resources such as the ready and free availability of social media as a means of communication. Its ability to do so depends on the capability of the leader-managers we have within the sector.

With feedback and involvement from managers facing these challenges and some re-design and reshaping of the curriculum and learning materials, LPoC is the ideal programme to equip managers to rise to these challenges successfully.

**Key points**

- Funding reductions, job insecurity and the increasing diversity and complexity of service provision models mean that successful providers of homelessness services need managers with high level leadership skills.
- ‘Hard’ skills such as commercial acumen, project management, and service design and development are particularly relevant to current and future needs.
- In addition, managers will need to learn effective people management techniques and the ‘softer’ leadership, interpersonal and partnership skills associated with the ability to achieve results with and through others.
- From the outset CIH has partnered with managers from the homelessness sector to design and refine the LPoC programme. For this reason it has been uniquely placed to deliver essential knowledge and skills which can be applied immediately by managers to solving the real problems and challenges they face.
- LPoC is forward looking, continually evolving to anticipate and address future leadership skills needs for the sector.
The ‘Right Stuff’ for leaders in social housing

By Dr. Robert Rosenfeld, Chief Executive, Centre for Organizational Excellence

Summary

The housing industry has been in a period of ‘transition’ for many years. These changes are generating a context where existing strategies, values and behaviours are being called into question. This article explores what these changes will mean for leadership in the housing industry. It will also identify the key criteria for effective housing leaders of the future.

Introduction – learning from astronauts

In Tom Wolfe’s 1969 best-selling book and subsequent Hollywood film, The Right Stuff, the author describes the circumstances and characters surrounding the beginning of the Mercury space programme in the United States. Aside from many insights surrounding that period, one aspect resonates with the situation current leaders in social housing face. After initially assuming that the natural talent pool for astronauts would be the well-established and successful body of military test pilots, NASA recognised that the skills of test pilots (heroic, technically skilled individualists who were excellent pilots) would not fit with the behaviours required of astronauts. The role of astronauts called for analytical problem solving, patience, feeling comfortable when not in control, and most importantly being part of a team both in the capsule as well as on the ground. In essence, Wolfe creates a tension between what the ‘right stuff’ was for a test pilot and a very different set of capabilities for astronauts. There are signs now that the ‘right stuff’ for social housing leadership may also be in a similar transition.

Changing context = changing ‘stuff’

Social housing has been a sector in ‘transition’ for a significant time! Trends that have been building for a while appear to be creating a context where existing strategies, values and behaviours are being called into question. Contextual pressures are diverse but often point to the following four themes:

a) A changing social ideology in housing – away from a welfare oriented approach to one focusing on social and economic returns.

b) Social housing providers are increasingly encouraged to recognise the commercial aspects of providing a (up until now) regulated service and to identify innovative ways of growing the business.
c) Fragmentation and specialisation within the industry will create a diversity of business models (differing sources of revenue, a diversity of cost bases, and a re-evaluation of the investment/capital acquisition criteria).

d) A fundamental shift in how social housing providers use technology to deliver a more personalised service.\textsuperscript{42}

In the same vein, Schofield (2008) highlights the challenges within the public sector:

I. Increasing pace of change.
II. Technological developments.
III. Changing perceptions.
IV. Increasing expectations.
V. Citizen empowerment.
VI. Changing workforce.
VII. Changing environment.

Current and aspiring leaders in social housing can look at the highlights illustrated in the above paragraph and mutter, ‘we have seen it all before’ – and they would be largely correct. However, that is also the problem – the solutions that they may have (inadvertently) put forward have not fundamentally changed their organisations or sustainably resolved the underlying causes of the situation.

**What was the ‘Right Stuff’?**

The practice of leadership in social housing is understandably diverse and no single model or approach can satisfactorily demonstrate the richness that is observed. However, on a generic level, leaders in social housing can sometimes be viewed as calling on their ability to assess the situation, stabilise the condition, and buy time to find a robust solution. In this context, successful leadership is viewed as comprising of: analytical problem solving, clear decision making and the articulation of direction. Sounds about right...*with one problem*...if the solution was so good, why does the problem continue to re-appear?

Ronald Heifetz and colleagues at the JFK School of Government at Harvard University have been examining the application of ‘technical leadership’. This approach can be effective in certain circumstances:

a) When there is a clear problem and solution.
b) The solution can be implemented by the exertion of authority.

c) The solution is easily accepted and leads to a lowering of conflict among stakeholders.

d) The solution restores equilibrium and leads to on-going stakeholder satisfaction.

Within social housing, it would appear that many solutions proposed and implemented by leadership teams were based on the presumptions of ‘technical leadership’ – a solution exists and can restore confidence and drive progress. By adopting leadership actions such as: short-term fixes, tightening of controls and restructuring, we create an appearance of the return of normalcy. This is an illusion that many leaders will recognise and seek some solace within.

However, as Heifetz and his colleagues point out, there are some pretty obvious indicators that technical leadership has been inappropriate. Clues include:

a) The same problem keeps re-surfacing.

b) There is resistance among stakeholders and you don’t really understand why.

c) People behave as if ‘the world is going to end’!

d) (And, perhaps most tellingly) you feel incompetent.

The ‘Right Stuff’ for social housing leadership

If you have skipped down to this section looking for prescriptive action points, you should read the previous section! The time constrained drive to find a solution is actually part of the leadership problem we can sometimes see within the sector. Chua et al (2011) refer to the ‘whiplash’ effect created by shorter electoral cycles and a pressure to engage in ‘change for changes sake’.

Heifetz and his colleagues put forward the term ‘adaptive leadership’ to describe the challenges facing individuals who wish to take on the challenge of providing organisational direction. At its highest level of abstraction, adaptive leadership can be distilled into four broad themes of leadership effectiveness:

1. **Confrontation and prototyping** – In his book, *Good To Great*, Jim Collins (2001) refers to leaders that are willing to challenge the status quo by focusing on ‘turning over rocks and looking at all of the squiggly things underneath... even if what you see can scare the hell out of you’(p.72). The challenge is not just to recognise the problem. Given that there are no ‘easy’ answers, leaders need to recognise that
effective solutions do not emerge from the first (often obvious) response. As a consequence, leadership teams need to adopt some practices used by innovation teams to ‘prototype’ alternative designs and actions. Prototyping takes time and effort and requires the acceptance of failure. Leaders need to champion experimentation to both fully understand the challenges as well as identify possible design solutions.

2. **Sustaining a ‘burning platform’** – The Nobel Prize winning economist, Herbert Simon (1955), coined the term ‘satisficing’ to identify actions that satisfy minimum requirements (‘good enough’). Adaptive leaders actively avoid such outcomes by a dogged determination to find innovative solutions. Often such solutions require radical approaches that incorporate a diversity of inputs and a healthy dose of creative thinking.

3. **Leadership is a team game** – Hierarchy is often the enemy of adaptive leadership. By looking upwards for preferred outcomes or decisions, leadership is over-ruled by organisational expediency. Adaptive leaders foster leadership responsibility at all levels of an organisation. All stakeholders should be mobilised to generate solutions. This takes time and patience – particularly when cultural norms run counter to shared leadership. An important element is the need to enhance the culture of diversity so that a multiplicity of options can be identified, evaluated and implemented. Ulrich and Smallwood (2012) highlight the paradox that the focus on developing individual leaders can sometimes constrain the development of leadership. Effective leaders must actively seek to enhance the bench strength of leadership in the organisation to the point where they become recognised as ‘leader feeders’ for other organisations. Of course, there is regret when talent goes elsewhere, but the benefit is that young talent is also attracted by the prospect of growth and development.

4. **Understanding your ‘inner game’** – The renowned sports coach and writer Timothy Gallwey (2000) identified that to be successful in any endeavour; individuals (including leaders) need to recognise their own human nature – which includes characteristics such as fear, self-doubt, lapses in focus, and limiting concepts or assumptions. The inner game is played to overcome the self-imposed obstacles that prevent an individual or team from accessing their full potential. To maintain oneself as an effective leader, individuals need to look after their own emotional well-being by ensuring that they have outlets to question themselves and reflect on their behaviours. Coaching and mentoring often can be useful in this regard.
Are you an adaptive leader?

Although no simple set of questions can portray how adaptive leadership is effectively undertaken in any organisation, the following set of questions (adapted from Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009) can be a good start for assessing adaptive leadership in an organisation:

- How frequently does the ‘unspeakable’ get said and discussed? How quickly are crises surfaced and bad news discussed (rather than impose a knee-jerk reaction)?
- How apparent are behaviours that are broadly seen as acting for the benefits of the organisation rather than protecting individual groups or silos?
- When someone is seen to take a risk in service of the organisational mission, and it does not work out, to what extent is this seen as a learning opportunity rather than a failure?
- To what extent are senior managers seen to identify and mentor their successors?
- To what extent do individuals and teams in the organisation reflect and learn from experience?

The ‘Right Stuff’ leads to the right results

The Government of Singapore has instituted the PS21 programme. This initiative is designed to ‘encourage a mind-set that welcomes experimentation and a desire to continually find new and better ways of doing things. PS21 gives every public officer the mandate and platform to contribute their ideas for a successful Public Service’. Although broad in scope, the PS21 initiative is designed to encourage a people-centred mass movement to increase involvement and commitment to new, innovative solutions to persistent social problems. Such approaches call upon principles of co-creation and collaboration across organisational boundaries. In the UK, NESTA is working with local councils and other public sector institutions to nurture collaborative activities (Boyle & Harris, 2010). It is clear from an organisational perspective that such practices can potentially offer many benefits. However, for such initiatives to be sustained requires leadership teams that recognise the advantages and are prepared to adopt different values and behaviours that foster openness, innovation and culture change.

Social housing and the public sector in general, are struggling with the legacy of a culture that reinforced a reluctance to fundamentally alter how organisations saw themselves and their operating environments. In much the same way as the ‘heroic’ test pilots of the 1950s and 60s were seen as representing previous accomplishments,
leaders in social housing must look beyond what has worked in the past and adopt behaviours that suit the new conditions facing the public sector. A dogged determination that solutions can be found by adhering to behaviours and perspectives that we have experienced in the past is likely to lead to under-performance. Instead, we must recognise that new models of leadership must emerge that take into account the fundamental truth that new perspectives and behaviours – drawn from a wide range of sources and experiences will be necessary if we are to deliver on our promises.

**Finding out more**


Key points

- Rapid change in the housing industry is creating a challenge for leaders where existing strategies, values and behaviours are being called into question.
- The solutions put forward in the past may no longer be effective for the future: in fact they are likely to lead to under-performance.
- Adaptive leadership is an approach which enables leaders to thrive in changing and challenging contexts.
- Leaders must be prepared to adopt different values and behaviours that foster openness, innovation and culture change.
Learning...so what’s changing?

By Trevor Smith, Director of Centre for Partnership

Summary

This piece offers the author’s insights into learning and is based on his experience of working with many housing associations and the different client groups within them. The 10 x INSIGHTS offered to the reader in this article distil the writer’s experience of enabling learning in housing organisations as they move from the orderliness of 20th Century organisational life into the complex and disruptive realities of the 21st Century.

Learning – what’s changing?

21st Century mastery appears to be different to that of the 20th Century and enacting this new mastery is arguably the real engine room of corporate change. This challenging environment brings with it the opportunity for a refreshed approach to learning. The demise of state welfarism, continued economic recession, growing inequalities in income, barriers to educational attainment plus legislative and regulatory changes present more extreme challenges to housing organisations. We cannot rely on ‘business as usual’ and the 10 x INSIGHTS have informed the author in helping housing organisations move to new mastery for the 21st Century.

INSIGHT number one – Tomorrow doesn’t have to be the same as today...indeed it won’t be

From research and experience, it appears many of us still do not like change... despite the fact that the pace, complexity and magnitude of change is greater than ever before. In addition, most of us, when faced with problem solving and decision making about the future take the solutions of the past as our reference point.

Organisations of the 20th Century were built upon predictability, order and hierarchy and could operate on a ‘what did we do the last time’ basis. However, reliance on ‘back to the future’ solutions will not address the complexities and tensions facing the housing industry of the 21st Century. So often the analyses and priorities for our fast changing world get stuck in the business models and business thinking of yesteryear. We seek to drive down costs, extract efficiencies and avoid risks as the antidote to funding, resource
LEARNING…SO WHAT’S CHANGING?

and revenue shortages. This is known as ‘Red Ocean’ thinking and it has its place, but should it be at the expense ‘Blue Ocean’ solutions which aim to creatively look at adding value to what we do?

High value solutions are often born out of new and different thinking but few organisations view creativity and innovation as an essential organisational competence which is explicit and embedded in the way the business is run. Without embedded creativity we are anchored in the ways of the past and we are slow to respond and improve people's lives.

INSIGHT number two – Whole person learning is essential…

for fulfilment and success

It used to be a popular 20th Century adage that for many people organisational life amounted to ‘hanging up their brain with their coat’ as they went into work. Thankfully the 21st Century has seen gradual recognition by successive UK governments of the importance of people engagement at work. This was exemplified by the Macleod report which makes a compelling case for the importance of psychological ownership of work and the emotional engagement of people in their work.

The real gains in productivity, efficiency and creativity derive from greater psychological engagement. This means seeing people in ‘whole person’ terms. It begins to recognise that when personal values, emotions and thinking align with the needs of the business there is a powerful psychological contract which goes far beyond the wage/effort equation. Viewing staff in ‘whole person’ terms and helping them align with a cause based on an organisation's vision requires leaders who are emotionally intelligent and skilled at making the most of their people.

Show me an organisation in which the vast majority of leaders hold regular and meaningful one-to-ones with their staff, in which both work and personal issues are openly addressed, and I will guarantee a high performing staff team and organisation. The vast majority of people want to align and emotionally engage with their organisation. It is not a simplification to say that many people leave an organisation because of their boss!

INSIGHT number three – Left and right brain thinking are required in the 21st Century

Managerial sophistication in the late 20th Century was exemplified by the growth in university business schools and MBAs. Many of these postgraduate qualifications were based on ‘left brain’ thinking which means it prioritised logical, fact-based, analytical
and quantitative problem solving for managerial leaders. This trend was reinforced by a similar concentration on the importance of planning, organisation and sequential problem solving.

No one would argue that problem solving in the world of work needs this ‘left brain’ approach but it is insufficient if it is not linked with ‘right brain’ thinking which will provide a more holistic approach to complex 21st Century problem solving. It is ‘right brain’ thinking which provides synthesising, integrating, intuitive and visionary approaches critical to joining up the dots in an increasingly complex world. It is this thinking which promotes new possibilities. It is the right of brain which also connects to empathy, the emotional, the interpersonal and the spiritual. ‘Right brain’ thinking is vital to any social business. It is critical to housing especially when life’s playing field is less even and issues of social justice present themselves in a challenging and seemingly intractable operating environment.

The complex and challenging world of the social enterprise needs both left and right brain thinking to develop new business models and services which connect to the diverse client groups which 21st Century housing organisations serve. Sticking to the knitting of asset and housing management based on ‘left brain’ thinking is unlikely to provide for the long term sustainability of people and place.

**INSIGHT number four – Leaders are born…and made? Let’s not be random**

Much has been said and written about leadership; and whilst there have been many attempts to synthesise leadership literature, it is my direct experience of the leadership culture in housing which supports this particular insight. Firstly, there appear to be fewer ‘career leaders’ (that is people who first and foremost define their role and their being as that of a leader) and more who describe their role in technical or functional terms. Secondly, expectation of being a leader appears to emerge as a consequence of advancement in the workplace rather than being the goal itself. Becoming a leader, therefore, does not often appear to be at the forefront of the majority of people’s thinking about their role in the business. Nor is it always the organisation’s strongly expressed expectation of them.

Having made the above observations there appears to be no shortage of positive role models when people are asked to identify individuals who provide positive leadership in housing. A problem arises when the same people also say they can identify greater numbers of people who act as negative role models. If we then make the assumption
that effective leaders are important at all levels in the business and that we also expect Board Chairs and members to be leaders, we begin to appreciate there can be a ‘leadership deficit’ in many housing organisations.

Some housing organisations have addressed the ‘leadership deficit’ by articulating what they expect from their leaders. They have captured their thoughts in leadership models and leadership strategies to address this issue. By focusing on leadership in terms of values, motivation, relationship style and problem solving capabilities, these organisations have created the systems they need to identify leader talent, recruit and select leaders, appraise and develop leaders and to remunerate leaders.

**INSIGHT number five – Know who you are at source…and build your future accordingly**

‘Learning to change’ always sounds like a daunting proposition but it is one which has driven thinking about learning and development in a range of different organisations for some time. On the basis of my own professional experience there is another perspective to consider: sometimes it is not worthwhile to force people to fulfil roles which, quite frankly, are just not for them! Learning to know oneself, value oneself and be oneself provides a more accessible platform for directing oneself and one’s career.

The author believes that individuals have within themselves vast resources for self-understanding and for challenging self-limiting views. One of the keys to unlocking this process of self-understanding is an acceptance and a recognition that we are all individually different (and importantly) each one of us have unique gifts and talents. People who direct their lives in alignment with their gifts and talents lead fulfilled lives and are able to work productively and help others enthusiastically.

However, career journeys can sometimes drag people away from their unique gifts and talents. Veering off course has to be the responsibility of the individual; but addressing the reality of being on the ‘wrong course’ is addressed more effectively when employers recognise their contribution to events and support actions to enable the person to get on the ‘right course’. The costs of someone being on the ‘wrong course’ can be huge and the opportunity costs also very significant.

Actualisation for all of us is directed by our gifts and talents and 21st Century learning practices are better served by people and processes which enable people to articulate who they are and take responsibility for using their unique gifts and talents to direct themselves.
This ‘psychological mobility’ is a pre-step to social and economic mobility. Without this pre-step other interventions do not work as effectively. The growing practice of workplace coaching can help as it focuses on the individual and can personalise learning. The degree to which it is person centred will determine its effectiveness in helping individuals identify their gifts and redirect their futures inside and outside the business accordingly.

**INSIGHT number six – A team is endemically problematic…**

*take a more flexible approach*

The endless time and energies workplace teams consume raises the question whether the returns are worth the effort. True teamwork does yield outcomes which are greater than the sum of the parts, but the frequency with which this happens tends not always to be proportionate to the resources they consume.

Chief Executives and Directors appear to feel obliged to have a single team comprising of staff who report to them directly. There can be more benefit in modifying this 20th Century approach by having a network of teams rather than a single hierarchical team. Virtual teams, fixed life teams, single issue teams can all provide richer insights, analyses and solutions than the traditional team arrangement.

Seldom are senior hierarchical teams constructed with the object of ensuring they work as a cohesive and synergistic unit. More often members are in the team on the grounds of hierarchy and the function or specialism they represent. Silo thinking is not uncommon and politics and personalities can also be counter productive. Investment in learning and development does not always show a return and the challenges of the 21st Century suggest there is a need and an opportunity to rethink how teams are formed and operate. Reinvention can address an over reliance on traditional team structures and provide the opportunity to materially and psychologically engage more people on different bases in finding new solutions to complex problems.

**INSIGHT number seven – Stop learning and you die!**

This insight is a blatant truism but sadly it has not been appreciated by all. At the turn of the Millennium most leaders in housing organisations in England remained confident in the UK economy. Whilst house price inflation was in someways problematic, it also helped the bricks and mortar based business models stack up quite easily. However the 2008 crash provided a double reminder to housing organisations that ‘what goes up,
does indeed come down’ plus the ensuing recession and protracted economic downturn has created tougher times for tenants and communities.

Delivering on tough commercial imperatives whilst meeting social objectives is never easy and it is arguably more difficult in a time of recession where, efficiency savings and revenue/funding constraints are the norm. ‘Hunkering down’ though isn’t necessarily the best option when the wellbeing of tenants and communities are adversely affected by harsher social and economic conditions. There is, therefore a need for housing organisations to share best practice and this is commonly used as a method for organisational learning. However simply sharing housing best practice can seem somewhat parochial in comparison to the cosmopolitan experiences of learning which can be drawn from different sectors and continents. The boundaries between organisations are more permeable and there are significant learning opportunities available from new quarters.

**INSIGHT number eight – Leaders as custodians of culture…**

**how to develop a 100 year organisation**

Culture differentiates organisations from one and other. But culture is sometimes viewed as being so nebulous that it is taken as a given rather than a variable which can be understood and, if necessary, developed. Research indicates that the longevity of organisations is linked to leaders having a discernible and shared view of the underlying philosophy, values and beliefs of their organisation; and the motivation to sustain the culture into the future. Leaders are, therefore, the custodians of an organisation’s culture and also the people who are best placed to ensure its sustainability.

In organisational life, visions, missions and strategies come and go. It is the culture of the organisation which is enduring and will, if nurtured, ensure the organisation will exist to serve its stakeholders for many decades to come. In everyday terms it is possible to identify those leadership behaviours which reinforce the organisation’s culture and those that destroy it. It seems to be increasingly important for housing organisations to assure the majority of leaders are culturally aligned. The costs of non alignment are damaging because the development of sub-cultures erode corporate identity.

Some progressive housing organisations assure us that leaders are culturally aligned through various methods, including 360 feedback and performance management frameworks. The 21st Century housing leader is expected to have cultural intelligence and, importantly, the skills to ensure organisational culture permeates the whole organisation.
INSIGHT number nine – Culture is your brand... take pride in your appearance

In an industry which is crowded with many different providers, differentiation is more important to suppliers and customers alike. Culture is often defined as ‘the way we do things round here’ and it is the experiences of our organisation’s culture which will define in the minds and emotions of customers, stakeholders and staff how we are perceived and valued by those whom we serve. Seldom do we operate in an uncontested market space and the brand we offer is defined by the culture of our organisation. This is more than an exercise in customer service and customer care. The services and products we offer as a social business make powerful statements about our organisation and what it stands for. Whilst a sense of modesty and solidarity amongst housing organisations down-plays differentiation, differences do exist. In creating and delivering a value added service for customers, cultural differences between providers can be hugely important. The importance of these cultural differentiators enables service provision to move away from a ‘commodity’ mentality to a person and community focused approach which secures loyalty and the longer term commitment of customers.

INSIGHT number ten – Digitalisation is a power-shift of its own

Many years ago, as a young person learning how to sail, I grew to recognise and appreciate those sailors around me who could see shifts in the wind some time before it filled their sails. Those sailors were hugely empowered by their foresight and were seldom blown away or left becalmed. Intuitively I have the same feeling of awe and respect as the winds of digital change continue to blow. We know the effects are going to be massively transformational.

We have seen the impact the proliferation of hand-held devices has had in terms of making available all of the world’s knowledge; and how this knowledge is being placed in the hands of the many. Problem solving and decision making is changing. The boundaries between organisations are dissolving. The potential for greater self-reliance is apparent. Work location is at times irrelevant. Information flows know no distance. The impact of digitalisation on awareness of issues of social justice is emerging and the globalisation of concerns is becoming increasingly apparent.

What is more important is... it is happening now. How housing organisations harness the wind of digitalisation will influence the ways in which it can be used to deliver business value and improve communities. This requires leadership at all levels.
Key points

• The challenges facing housing organisations in the 21st Century are much more demanding than those of the 20th Century. There is less predictability in the housing industry. Transformation rather than business as usual is therefore required.

• Learning in housing organisations needs to take account of these challenges in order to bring about transformational change for the communities they serve. Transformational change requires transformational leadership which in turn requires personal transformation.

• The 10 INSIGHTS are offered as my views on what needs to be taken account of when seeking to bring about transformations at all 3 levels.

• The 10 INSIGHTS provide a ‘dashboard’ which can be used to focus and review the connected aspects of the 21st Century learning organisation.

• Show me an organisation which is productively taking account of the 10 INSIGHTS and I will see an organisation that is transformational.
Part two

Leading tomorrow
Introduction to Part two – leading tomorrow

By John Thornhill, Learning Officer at CIH

‘Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.’

John F Kennedy

Part two of this anthology considers in more detail the new skills and knowledge sets and approaches to learning which will be required by successful organisations operating in the housing industry of the future. Contributors to this anthology have identified some ‘golden threads’ which when viewed together provide a revealing depiction of tomorrow’s housing professional. We will consider some of these ‘golden threads’ below.

Learning to learn – A consistent view emerging from this project has been that the housing professional of the future will primarily need to ‘learn how to learn’; and that this engagement with learning on an on-going basis will be a defining characteristic of career pathways. As work becomes more complex, with continuous change an overarching feature, individuals will be confronted with work-based scenarios they have not encountered before. Learners will need to become increasingly flexible and adaptable, more focused on finding information and solutions and skilled at applying newly acquired knowledge in different contexts. For employers, there will be a move away from rigid competency frameworks, job/task-descriptions and process driven performance management. For individuals there will be a new emphasis on agility and the ability to respond to new ways of working.

‘Life in perpetual beta’ – The metaphor ‘life in perpetual beta’ is borrowed from the world of software engineering, but it adequately expresses the mutability of the modern workplace. ‘Perpetual beta’ is the name given to the keeping of software at the beta development stage for an extended or indefinite period of time. It is often used by developers when they continue to release new features that might not be fully tested. Increasingly, developers see their products as never reaching a defined end-stage of development, such is the reality of constant technological change. The metaphor ‘life in perpetual beta’ refers to the way in which technology transforms the ways in which we think about ourselves as individuals and a society; but by extension it also captures the speed of change in the modern age. Individuals and organisations will have to learn to act in less planned, less process-focused ways. This will also entail both individuals and employers being open to change, embracing transferability and thinking outside of traditional silos.
Creativity, reflexivity and systems thinking – Contributors to this anthology have also emphasised the need for greater creativity and reflexivity in the workplace. With specific reference to ways of working, the place of systems thinking has been a recurrent theme in this anthology. Systems thinking involves a less atomised, process-driven approach to problem solving, and a more reflexive way of working. It focuses on how a whole system operates rather than specific parts, outcomes or events. Systems thinking has the potential to effect wider transformations in the way organisations behave and deliver services. For individuals, a systems thinking approach entails greater creativity, thinking in non-linear ways, challenging closed-loop approaches, seeing systems as causes rather than effects; and focusing on what works rather than the processes which make a system function. In the future, there will be a need for housing organisations to nurture and develop creativity, invention and intuition, with a better balance between what people need to know (because what people need to know will be constantly changing) and a renewed focus on how people need to respond (because thinking and behaving flexibly and creatively will be the way to respond to ever changing situations).

Learning at work, through work – Research shows that 70 per cent of individual learning actually comes from ‘learning on the job’. This is a challenging statistic because historically, many housing organisations have focused learning and development planning on procuring external training and qualifications. While there can be no doubt that external training and qualifications continue to deliver quantifiable gains both to individuals and organisations, increasingly there will be a blurring of boundaries between work and learning and formal and informal work-based learning. This is partly because of the tougher funding climate for training, development and education; but it is also in response to rapid and continuous change in the workplace and the desire on the part of employers that learning and development should address the specific business needs of the organisation. Already CIH qualifications are rooted in reflective practice and the creation of communities of practice; but the housing organisation of the future is likely to be looking for more flexible learning solutions further rooted in workplace realities such as bespoke learning programmes, collaborative and blended learning, and experiential learning. It will also expect individual staff to take greater ownership of their own formal and informal learning in the workplace.

Increasing commerciality – Housing organisations are acutely concerned with reducing costs and achieving greater value for money. Coupled with a new financial reality of diminishing grant levels and threats to rental revenues off the back of welfare reform; there is an imperative for organisations to look to new funding models (for example,
bond finance) and revenue streams (for example, market rents or developing homes for private sale). This presents marked challenges for organisations seeking to select and upskill staff and Board members so they can respond effectively to increasing commercialisation in the industry. This will involve extending and developing skills and expertise in areas such as commissioning, value creation, contract management, business planning, market management strategies, tendering and procurement, competition law and practice, project management, resource management, budgeting and cost-control; and risk management.

**Partnerships, networks and greater connectivity** – Housing is essentially a networked profession. Increasingly housing organisations are working across different boundaries and forming different partnerships. This is partly in response to contractions in public sector funding across health, care and communities, but also in recognition of greater personalisation, co-production and service user involvement and scrutiny which makes consumers active agents. In addition, efficiency drivers are forging new ways of doing business and delivering cost effective outcomes. Housing professionals will need to further enhance skills for working in partnership including identifying potential partners, building and managing cross-organisational and cross-sectoral relationships, effective negotiation, persuading and influencing, obtaining stakeholder buy-in and support; and maintaining strategic and project focus.

Alongside partnership working, networking and greater connectivity will further influence the way in which social capital is shared within organisations and across the housing industry as a whole. Organisations will need to support greater connectivity in the workplace to facilitate faster and better knowledge and practice sharing. Housing providers will also need to better support and engage with opportunities for knowledge and practice sharing across the industry, if they are to collectively respond to an unpredictable future and hold their own with community partners and competitors. There is a vital role here for CIH to facilitate networking, greater connectivity and the sharing of social capital in the housing industry.

**Better understanding customers and customer behaviour** – Traditionally the housing curriculum has in part engaged with social policy and sociological learning domains with emphases on political theory and social theory. There can be no doubt that understanding the social and political context in which housing providers operate is necessary. But what is of emerging importance is a need to engage with learning domains which deliver a better understanding of customers, their aspirations and motivations. This approach will blend elements from psychology, sociology and
INTRODUCTION TO PART TWO – LEADING TOMORROW

Economics to understand the decision-making processes of customers both as individuals and as groups. This is being driven by the need for the housing industry to develop better approaches to customer relationship management, more discerning ways of working with diverse customers over a much broader product and service offer; and greater personalisation of services.

**Resilience** – The housing industry is already witnessing growing social pressures which are emerging from public spending cuts, welfare reform and a protracted economic downturn. While we have discussed in some detail greater commercialisation in the industry; providers are also focusing on their traditional role of providing support to some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of society. There is no doubt that this will exact a psychological and emotional toll on staff working with individuals experiencing very difficult and traumatic situations. This will be exacerbated by the need for landlords to ensure rents are collected. Staff will need support to develop resilience in the face of stress and adversity arising from this difficult dual role.

**Coaching and mentoring** – A number of organisations illustrated in part two of this anthology have invested a great deal of time and effort in coaching and mentoring both staff and individuals in communities. Coaching and mentoring are ways of taking a person-centred approach to learning and skills development and developing a better understanding of an individual’s needs, motivations and aspirations. Coaching and mentoring are vital compliments to formal training and learning because they are able to address more qualitative and affective factors which determine how individuals perform in the workplace and they provide an individual and targeted approach to professional development.
Talent management – can we afford not to?
By Chan Kataria, Group Chief Executive, EMH Group

Summary
EMH Group has embarked on a skills for the future project targeting leaders, front-line staff and customers in a challenging operational context for the housing industry as a whole. This is based on a belief that a strategic approach to talent management is vital if organisations are going to improve their business value, achieve their operational goals, and enable customers to be actively engaged in developing thriving and sustainable communities.

Responding to the changing context for the housing industry
We are all familiar with the current operating environment: the economy is in the deepest and longest recession we have known; welfare reform will affect the majority of our consumers and organisational business plans. In addition, the structure of the lending market has changed significantly; and, capital subsidies towards the development of affordable housing have all but ended.

The specific implications of this challenging context will obviously depend on the nature of the organisation concerned. However, there are common elements that will affect us all. Organisational cash-flows will be under greater strain; development activities will be undertaken on a more commercial basis; capital finance will be accessed in new ways; and, the way services are provided will need to be reconsidered. Organisations are reinventing themselves. As Keynes reminded us, if circumstances change, we should change.

Skills for the future at EMH Group
At EMH Group, we started a skills for the future project to review the skills we need to remain fit for the future. This includes leaders, front line staff and customers.

For some organisations, the easiest and most simplistic response is to reduce costs by removing employees. Whilst this may be necessary in some circumstances, it surely cannot be credible as the only response. Loss of key skills during an economic downturn arguably deprives the organisation of the very skills needed for when we return to growth – unless one takes the pessimistic view that recession will never end!
The essence of our own response at EMH Group has been to develop a comprehensive approach to talent management. At the simplest level this is about the way we recruit, engage, develop and retain people. Some examples below show what this means in practice. The intention here is not to provide a compendium of everything that we do, but to provide illustrative examples of how we are future-proofing our organisation.

**EMH Academy** – As part of the Group’s social enterprise initiative, we launched the *EMH Academy* last year. Acknowledged by local colleges as a shining example of best practice, it is designed to provide much more than the old style of apprenticeship. Apprentices are given the ability to learn, develop and grow through a more rounded exposure to various parts of the organisation. This is backed up by a comprehensive package of on-going support and evaluation involving line managers and ‘buddies’. As well as their day-to-day work, apprentices are involved in a range of wider team learning and development projects. For example, one apprentice team is looking at ‘how to make social housing a career of choice’. Another team was runner up in a national ‘Money for Life’ challenge.

**Leadership Development** – A key element of being a learning organisation is to develop leaders for tomorrow. In partnership with an external provider, we created a bespoke leadership development programme for the Executive Management Team (EMT) and senior managers. An important feature of this is external accreditation from the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM).

We approached the programme in three phases:

- **Phase One** involved the design and development of a leadership competency framework based on the core values of our business. Leaders were assessed against this framework and individual development needs identified.

- **Phase Two** involved the design and delivery of an interactive eight day modular based programme which all senior managers attended. The programme focused on key modules such as motivation and coaching, transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, team working, project management, commercial effectiveness and performance coaching.

- All of these skills were implemented in **Phase Three** of the programme, where leaders applied the practical skills learnt to deliver specific business projects. The effectiveness of the programme will be evaluated as a return on investment, including the bottom line benefits for the Group.
Coaching at EMH Group – All leaders are equipped to provide and receive coaching to improve performance. Coaching plays a crucial role in the development of careers and in achieving high levels of work performance. A typical coaching programme provides around six sessions to the individual (depending on need) and involves a 360 degree feedback session. Leadership coaching aims to help our leaders and managers increase their organisational and personal effectiveness, achieve identified business results, retain talent and reinforce underpinning Group values. Members of EMT also act as internal coaches in their role as sponsors of the leadership development project groups. This in turn develops their own core coaching skills and personal effectiveness.

Reviewing skills at Board level – Effective leadership begins with governance and we have undertaken a thorough review of skills at Board level. The skills needed to govern a more complex, diversified and commercial business which is attractive to the capital markets are different to those required in the past. As part of our Group structure review, all members in the Group stood down and applied for fewer Board places on the basis of revised skills and competencies. The new Board has a more commercial bias, but built on a strong commitment to the social values of the Group. Board members have an on-going programme of self development tailored to meet their specific needs.

Developing frontline staff and customers – The challenging operational context has also led us to consider a more concerted approach to training for front line staff and building the capacity of customers. The latter is not just borne out of altruism, but rooted in the belief that better skilled, empowered and engaged customers are more likely to participate as active citizens and contribute to the sustainability of their communities.

The Digital Literacy project – An example here of developing frontline staff and customers is the Digital Literacy (DLit) project. EMH Group is the sole UK delivery partner in a European Union funded initiative looking to test the effectiveness of training for excluded groups in Digital Inclusion. We are working with the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) to deliver this project, based on a self determined approach to training. The project will be delivered in a dozen pilot locations, focusing on four key target groups: homeless people, older people, minority communities and those affected by domestic violence. Pilot schemes will be provided with both a wi-fi connection and i-pad tablets. A team of 20 digital champions in the organisation are currently being trained to support residents to get online. The team comprises both employees and residents.
Supporting excellent customer service – A second example of projects aimed at developing frontline staff and customers is our adoption of structured training programmes to achieve excellence in customer services, both internally and externally. The Mary Gober International (MGI) programme is one such approach and focuses on the development of psychology or mind set, as well as language and behaviours, necessary to provide excellent services. This begins with an initial interactive two-day seminar combining tutoring with video input, quizzes and token prizes to help engage the delegates and embed the methodology. Subsequent sessions reinforce the learning until it becomes second nature and we move closer towards sustained and consistent practice of good customer skills.

Follow up surveys of staff suggest the skills and concepts learned have made significant improvements in their ability to provide excellent customer services. This is particularly noticeable in the way complaints are handled, with staff taking ownership and responsibility for problems and finding solutions.

Learning cafes – An additional example is that of learning cafes. These provide informal learning opportunities for staff to meet and learn from each other on topical issues. Utilising the extensive skills, knowledge and expertise of team members, a typical session lasts around a couple of hours. These have included subjects as varied as domestic violence, minute taking, sexual health, managing stress and resident engagement. Colleagues welcome the opportunity to share learning with each other and promote an effective learning organisation.

Finally, a great deal of effort is placed on building the capacity of customers to better regulate the Group’s services. Customers have been leading on redefining co-regulatory structures in the Group and identifying the learning and development activities necessary to enable them to scrutinise performance more effectively.

Coherence of approach – Frameworks such as Investors in People (IiP) and Investors in Excellence (IiE) are helpful in providing structure and coherence around learning and development initiatives. One of the leadership development projects is based on ‘Going for Gold’, a reference to the new IiP Gold Standard, which is a key objective for the Group when it is assessed for re-accreditation.

The desire for a more holistic approach led us to develop a learning partnership with CIH. This partnership comprises three strands: in-house study opportunities leading to a Level 3 Award and Certificate in housing; provision of carefully targeted short modules
and day courses; and, membership of CIH for office based staff. To date, over 70 members of staff have taken up membership.

A blended learning approach is used to deliver the various modules, using a combination of direct teaching in the workplace, supported by distance learning materials and the on-going support of a tutor. The flexible approach means that students can work at their own pace and around their personal and professional commitments. External accreditation means that students have the benefits of a transferrable qualification.

**Conclusion**

Few organisations in this sector have a formal strategy for talent management in the way that they do for asset management, financial management or housing management (EMA Business Management Consultancy, *Talent Management Survey*, May 2009). If we accept that people are our greatest resource and that effective recruitment, development, engagement and retention of employees is more crucial now than ever, then we need to think more proactively about talent management.

**Key points**

- Active talent management is vital for organisations to improve their business value, achieve their goals and support engaged and satisfied customers.
- Loss of key skills during an economic downturn can deprive an organisation of the very skills it needs when the economy improves.
- A key element of being a learning organisation is to develop leaders for tomorrow and this requires a strategic and targeted approach.
- A review of skills for the future should cover all levels of the organisation, including Board members, executive, middle managers and front line staff.
- Supporting skills development and empowering customers will enable them to participate as active citizens and contribute to the sustainability of their communities.
New Charter – learning for life

By Christine Amyes, Executive Director of People at New Charter

Summary

New Charter has adopted an innovative and transformational approach to life-long learning as a key ingredient in achieving their vision of Great Homes, Great Neighbourhoods and Great People. This has included the development of a broad and holistic culture of learning which embraces staff, tenants, residents and their children.

New Charter: our values and our vision

New Charter is built on core principles of:

- Our GREAT values – Genuine, Respect, Excellence, Achieve and Together which run through everything we do.

- Continuous improvement – through a commitment to systems thinking, coaching, employee engagement, customer focus, performance management and leadership.

- Corporate social responsibility – striving to ensure we meet standards way beyond the expectations of government and regulators.

We believe that an organisation that has a culture of learning and innovation is a place where people want to be and want to succeed. We invest in the development of our people and believe that this is crucial in achieving our vision of ‘Great Homes, Great Neighbourhoods, Great People’. We recognise we cannot do this in isolation and have a history of collaborative working within the housing industry and beyond.

The New Charter Learning Centre

Almost ten years ago we launched the New Charter Learning Centre with the aim of providing lifelong learning opportunities for all our people – employees, tenants and their families. We could not have envisaged at that stage the range of directions this work would take us in.

The learning centre was launched in partnership with the Trades Union Congress (TUC) Learning and GMB Trade Union. We jointly funded two learning co-ordinators and
appointed Union Learning Representatives from employees at all levels of the organisation to explore skills gaps and learning needs, provide information; and forge a link to the opportunities available. This was hugely successful with 50 per cent of employees engaging in some way with the centre.

A primary aim was the need to raise core skills – now known as functional skills – later strengthened by our commitment to the Skills Pledge following the Leitch Report into Skills in the UK. A significant proportion of targeted employees achieved Level 2 core skills qualifications – for some this was the first qualification or award they had ever gained.

**Building a culture of learning**

We wanted to establish a strong culture of learning *in itself* being a good thing. We didn’t restrict learning to those skills directly required for job roles but encouraged any learning that increased wider skills. Popular learning areas included foreign languages, craft and DIY skills and photography; in addition to English and Maths.

In order to embed this, we encouraged our people to involve their families in their learning. Many did this and learned new skills with their partners and their children. We encouraged our own staff to share skills and many courses are delivered by employees with skills in relevant areas.

Through our resident involvement and regeneration teams we have included tenants in learning opportunities, taking courses out into community hubs and providing resources for tenants to access learning, share skills, gain qualifications and build confidence. This aspect of our work has now become much greater as welfare reform and continuing high levels of unemployment have impacted on our communities.

The Learning Centre is now incorporated into mainstream learning and development practices. Organisational training budgets have been increased during the recent economic downturn; we recognise that it is only by maintaining and building the skills of our people that we will be able to deliver the aspirations of our corporate plan.

We are an accredited Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) centre and City and Guilds centre enabling us to offer externally recognised qualifications. We have close links with local colleges who are keen to work with us in delivering courses and events that are tailored to our learners’ needs to achieve maximum return on investment.
We work collaboratively with other housing providers. We have developed a successful Neighbourhood Development Programme in partnership with other Airport Group members to meet a skills gap identified in light of the changing roles of housing professionals. This programme is delivered by Airport Group members, is endorsed by ILM and has won a National Training Award. The latest programme has delegates from seven housing providers coming together to develop new skills and share expertise and experience.

Leadership development is a priority and we have a range of interventions available for managers at all levels from Level 2 Team Leader ILM programmes through to executive coaching for Directors. All our managers are trained coaches with many senior managers being trained to certificate and postgraduate diploma level. On our most recent leadership programme, ‘G-Force’, managers from all levels attend modules to explore managing others, managing self, managing the business and managing change. The mix of levels – from first line supervisors to directors is intended to allow for an exchange of views and experiences, shared understanding and awareness; and new networks to form. Initial feedback and evaluation is very positive.

We continue to actively support non-vocational learning and hold an annual ‘Dragons’ Den’ where employees can pitch for funds for any learning activity for themselves and their family members. The ‘Dragons’ include our Chief Executive and awards have been made for activities as diverse as cycle maintenance, Turkish language, ballroom dancing, karate, yacht day skipper and singing lessons!

A more recent addition is our ‘Catching the Dream’ competition where people bid for funds to achieve an ambition. We have enabled two employees to set up a bee hive and three others to do a parachute jump.

In all of these cases we ask employees to give something back. Examples include a New Charter choir being established, a cycling club being set up, a bee hive situated on the roof of our offices; and charities benefitting from sponsorship. We haven’t yet worked out a way to benefit directly from the yacht day skipper course!

There is a clear understanding across the Group that we support learning and employees are keen to talk to their managers and to the organisational transformation team about their development. We provide interest free learning loans, encourage secondments, both internal and external, and wherever possible promote from within. We have a talent management programme called ‘Ingenium’ which is actively supported
by Group Management team and directors who are mentors and coaches for delegates. An in-depth residential coaching programme ‘Courage and Spark’ which forms part of the programme is co-delivered by the Chief Executive and the Executive Director of People.

We have featured in The Sunday Times Best Companies to Work for lists for the past five years, securing a place in the top 20 for the past four consecutive years. Our commitment to learning and development is recognised by our employees in their responses and comments in the survey. We score consistently high for ‘Personal Growth’ and were awarded the Best Companies Training and Development award in 2011.

**Improving lives through learning**

Our work with our customers is built on the same belief that learning is a way of improving people’s way of life. We provide a range of opportunities for our tenants to engage in learning – either to improve their work prospects or to enrich their lives in other ways. We hold joint employee and tenant learning days and celebrate learning achievements for customers and employees alike.

As housing providers we have unique relationships with local communities and many of us use this access to tackle worklessness and create more sustainable communities. We have a wide range of interventions from which tenants can gain experience and workplace skills, build confidence and hopefully go on to employment. Through our ‘Great Opportunities’ programme we arrange and host work placements and training, facilitate volunteering, hold job clubs, provide accredited training and are involved with a ‘time-banking’ scheme where people swap skills. Results from this programme are encouraging; from April 2012 to March 2013 our ‘Great Opportunities’ programme has helped 80 local people into paid work.

In partnership with the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce and Greater Manchester Housing Providers we, as lead employer, have made an ambitious bid to the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) for Employer Ownership of Skills funding to dramatically increase the impact we can make in reducing worklessness. We intend to create a pathway to improve skills by intervening in career discussions in the final year of school in every secondary school in Greater Manchester, by developing and delivering a new six month traineeship and by doubling the number of apprenticeships on offer. We will work with our supply chain and with small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to increase still further apprenticeship and employment opportunities for our tenants.
Our own employees will need support and training to enable them to manage and supervise this large group of trainees and apprentices and we will ensure that this is delivered.

**Investing in young people – academy sponsorship**

A more unusual aspect of our commitment to lifelong learning is our involvement in the education of children and young people. Building on the work we have already undertaken in our communities with young people, we took the unprecedented step in 2008 of sponsoring an academy for 1,650 young people in the heart of one of our communities.

Our rationale for sponsoring the academy came from our commitment to create sustainable communities. We want to be able to improve the life chances of young people and felt that our sponsorship could make a difference. We wanted our future tenants to be economically active and able to pay their rent and we also need a future workforce with high skills levels.

We invested in two poorly performing schools (one already in special measures) and two demotivated and underperforming staff groups. We introduced a new management structure, implemented new business support processes, worked closely with teaching and support staff to identify and resolve issues; and began work on the design of a new school building to be funded by the Building Schools for the Future programme (both existing school buildings were dilapidated and were not fit for purpose).

The New Charter Academy has now moved into its fantastic new home; the school is truly a hub for the community with community access and integration a key feature. The senior leadership team of the academy includes a Community and Regeneration Director, seconded from New Charter Housing, who is the primary link between the school community and our own neighbourhood and regeneration teams. Her team promote links with other local groups and employers to ensure that learning opportunities are available to all – regardless of age, background or experience.

As a result of our experience with the New Charter Academy we were asked to sponsor further schools and formed a multi academy trust, the Great Academies Education Trust, which now sponsors three academies with further schools seeking to join.

As sponsors we have a strong presence on the Great Academies Education Trust and have engaged the commitment of local business and educational leaders to support us.
We are directly involved in each school, with an Executive Director as Chair of each governing body. We commit our time and the expertise of our professional staff to provide business services to the academies; allowing the academy staff to concentrate on education. We provide work placements and careers interventions; we support curricular and extra-curricular support for specific projects – for example, to the academy PR and media club and for enterprise events.

We have worked closely with our academies to involve them in some of our key projects, providing a new dimension to our work whilst offering unique learning opportunities for the students. Our latest venture sees us work with our two secondary academies to involve them in our exhibition at the CIH Annual Conference.

Our academies have improved the educational offer available to young people in our communities and have proved to be a hub where the community can come together to develop skills and further their education. We have joint programmes with students and tenants – for example with the Royal Exchange Theatre, the Bridgewater Hall and the Manchester United Foundation.

In the New Charter Academy the first cohort of sixth formers all achieved their required A level grades and went on to the university of their choice. GCSE results have improved dramatically although there is still more work to be done; and our primary academy has raised standards to ensure that children moving on to secondary education will have a good start in the next stage of their education.

**Visioning the future**

We will continue to build our business in line with our corporate plan. Our commitment to tackling worklessness in our communities will mean that we will continue to find new and innovative ways to engage with tenants and with local partners to develop new opportunities for learning and employment.

We will continue to invest in the development of our employees and strive to instil a thirst for learning in all our people. Leadership development will be a priority as we steer a course through the challenging environments ahead.

We will work more in partnerships with others to generate a greater force to deliver more outcomes for our tenants and our employees. Joint programmes with other agencies will allow a more holistic approach and ensure that learning outcomes are more achievable and sustainable and more likely to lead to employment.
Our investment in our academies will continue to grow. We will work collaboratively with others to improve the educational offer to young people in our communities and ensure they have the skills needed to be successful in the workplaces of the future.

**Key points**

- An organisation that has a culture of learning and innovation is a place where people want to be and want to succeed.

- Learning opportunities which target skills deficits are vital for organisations to succeed, but equally important is the creation of a culture where learning and self-development is seen as a good thing *per se*.

- Learning is a way of improving people's lives and as housing providers we have unique relationships with our communities and with people who would benefit most from learning interventions.
People power – engaging residents and staff to future-proof your organisation

By Paul Hackett, Chief Executive of AmicusHorizon

Summary

Innovative and creative approaches to resident involvement are not just a legacy of consumer regulation: effective resident involvement has the potential to transform businesses, enhance civic engagement, improve life options for individual tenants and contribute to a localist agenda. In this article AmicusHorizon shows how it is empowering and harnessing the potential of residents to future-proof the organisation in changing times.

From co-regulation to civic governance

At first glimpse you might think we’re swimming against the tide. Seven years ago, when the political and economic backdrop was different, Communities Minister, David Miliband threw down the gauntlet for housing associations. Clutching the Elton Review, he threw in both carrot and stick: improve the involvement of tenants and we’ll reduce the regulatory burden.

Fast forward and much of the knotweed of regulation has been pruned away. There is no doubt that sector-wide resident involvement has improved. But now the deal has been done on regulation and the political narrative through the welfare war of words has tended to demonise our tenants, the motivation may be lacking. As the much maligned pink campervan of the stricken Tenant Services Authority (TSA) spluttered across the country in search of a ‘big conversation’ I think the tide may have turned.

And yet we still haven’t quite persuaded the world that the housing industry is accountable. The perceptions audit carried out for the National Housing Federation (NHF) in 2012 found that nearly half of cross party MPs didn’t think housing associations were sufficiently accountable to the communities in which they work.

This matters. This matters because as the industry fractures along emerging fault lines we will need to demonstrate a compelling unique selling point against private competition. Not delivering a profit to shareholders is an obvious one but accountability
is up there. We must shift these (largely untrue) perceptions as part of telling our story better. I challenge any politician to come and assess the accountability of our business to the places in which we operate. We work in some deeply deprived areas and I’m convinced the time we invest in bringing our residents on board and facilitating local leadership bears fruit in those communities. Resident involvement should not be seen as the hobby-horse of a previous government. The benefits are totally in tune with localism, big society and a push to greater individual responsibility. In fact I think it’s time for another gauntlet to be thrown down around civic governance – and our experience at AmicusHorizon may help this proposition.

The AmicusHorizon story
In 2007, AmicusHorizon was placed into regulatory supervision. We faced financial difficulties and organisational disharmony. Customers were unhappy with inconsistent service, staff were worried, de-motivated and lacking in vision. Performance was poor and we had to change. Our Board appointed a new Strategic Executive Team and Lord Charlie Falconer took the Chair. Our somewhat daunting targets were to drive culture change, rebuild belief, boost confidence and lift performance. Supervisory placements took care of the Board and the new recruits at the top brought energy to the task. But changing senior personnel alone will not reverse organisational decline. We realised that without our staff and residents working together to lead the change we would never succeed.

So we asked, ‘what does great look like?’ This clarified our strategic and operational plans. It also shaped our leadership development. The central theme was building a ‘One Team’ spirit between our board, staff and customers. We set clear and unambiguous goals – to be a number one performer in London and the South East and a great employer. The foundations were laid for our long-term commitment to resident involvement.

Supporting culture change with training and development
For significant culture change to take place, two parallel streams of work with staff and residents were initially necessary in order to set direction. The work with staff isn’t the focus of this paper but I think our three planks of training are essential to an understanding of our approach with residents:

• Firstly, we had to get our customer service right. Staff needed to understand the principles of service delivery and to that end we introduced a rigorous customer care training programme.
• Secondly, our communication needed to improve. We embraced customer friendly writing and trained staff to think more about our audience and improve the accessibility of written communication. This helped build better, more transparent relationships with our residents.

• Finally, we delivered training and development opportunities aimed at developing the whole person. This focused on positive thinking and overcoming self-limiting beliefs. Confident, positive, staff, who take responsibility for their actions will always work better with customers. It could be argued, then, that our approach starts with our customers and works backwards.

The work stream with residents was about building structures and trust. We created our co-regulatory resident governance structure in stages. A Resident Board Member Steering Group was established first to design and implement the new framework. We took every opportunity to work face-to-face with residents – and they certainly took the time to tell us what was wrong. Gradually people believed our values of openness, honesty and integrity. We established Local Area Panels (LAPs) for residents which covered our areas of operation in London and Surrey, Sussex and Kent. These fed into a Residents Council. Acutely aware of the role repairs played in the fortunes of customer satisfaction, we also set up Repairs and Maintenance Panels (RAMPS) to scrutinise our performance. Once the main structural elements of our resident governance were in place, we undertook a major review to test its effectiveness. Any weaknesses were identified and ironed out. And from now strong, structural foundations, we grew our resident involvement strategy.

Our new resident involvement strategy gives people a menu of choices around how they would like to be involved. But the involvement needs to be meaningful. This includes:

• Responsibility for identified budgets.
• Scrutiny of performance.
• Financial information and autonomy to shape local services.

As we move forward, our residents will be at the heart of our new leaning thinking programme we’ve named WOW, or ‘Ways of Working’. Residents tell us what they value. This helps us to map processes to enhance those things whilst throwing the rest out. If it doesn’t matter to residents then ditch it.

The parallel processes with staff and residents, have now come together. Under our ‘One Team’ approach, we held joint sessions for staff, residents and Board members to
turn our ‘five star governance’ aspiration into reality. Staff, residents and Board members are trained together so we all move in the same direction. Bridges have been built and we all learn from each other. Our approach culminated in re-shaping our staff structure to place resident involvement ‘slap bang’ in the middle of operations. Under one ‘Co-regulation Directorate’ we now have a virtuous circle of formal governance, resident governance and resident involvement. Four years ago, we were an organisation that didn’t talk to their residents. Now it runs through everything we do and is part of our culture and attitude. For resident involvement to work, it needs to form the nucleus of operations rather than just a box-ticking add-on.

Organisations should think long and hard about the skills required to generate a truly customer focused service – and not be afraid to make training or recruitment decisions accordingly. When staff see residents as collaborators then an organisation is half way down the road to improving performance through involvement. Only with a mature relationship can an organisation begin to address performance improvements with residents and staff.

People engagement makes great business sense

Our approach to resident involvement has worked for the business. Our customer satisfaction is now at 95 per cent; we’ve been a top 20 Sunday Times Best Company for two years running and we’re the only large landlord in the South East to achieve ‘Co-Regulatory Champion’ status. We’ve won a mass of awards and turned our fortunes around with residents at the helm. Our residents have led our improved performance and the culture and structures which allow them to do this are now embedded. Engaged residents care about the future of the organisation and emotional bonds are tighter.

Imagining the future

So what of the future? We want to be the best landlord in the country in three years and our residents are absolutely critical to achieving this goal. A consumer approach is helpful here. The world is changing and old certainties no longer light our way. It’s more important than ever that we treat our residents as the consumers they are. And we should learn from those who do this well. There has been much written about residents never being able to fulfil their role as consumers as they’re unable to vote with their feet. Whatever your view on this, we can’t deny that housing organisations are now reaching out to people at every level of the ‘broken housing market’ and choice is a
growing feature. At the other end of the consumer scale, when things go wrong, the private sector understands (mostly) that complaints can no longer be filed away as a closed volley of written correspondence. If we make mistakes the world will now know about them as social media trends #badservice.

Our journey to be the best landlord means that we’re constantly learning from others and building new partnerships. We’re working on a resident exchange with a French housing association, for example, to bring cutting edge sustainability improvements to homes in Kent. The IFORE project focuses on reducing the environmental impact of homes and centres on our residents. We aim, for instance, to have 3,000 children trained up as energy champions through the project. And we’re planning to work in partnership with CIH to bring professional qualifications through our AmicusHorizon Academy. The Academy will be, of course, for Board, staff and residents to learn and gain skills together.

Getting skills, structure and culture right for great resident involvement are imperative. This has paid dividends in terms of performance improvements. And making sure we’re constantly looking to learn and build our involvement helps us future-proof. But to return to my initial proposition around civic governance, it’s worth examining some of the wider benefits of involvement. Our involved residents are building strong communities and it’s interesting how this chimes with the idea of a smaller state and greater personal responsibility. Through the power of volunteering to working with other residents to improve life chances, we are creating confident ambassadors. There’s something here about future-proofing communities too.

In conclusion, we arrived at resident involvement through a dual approach with residents and staff which then culminated in a significant organisational structure change. Our strategic approach has been to streamline and de-clutter the business to focus on the things which are important to residents. And we’re learning together as well as learning from others. Our aspiration – to be the best landlord – will be nothing but a dream if residents aren’t at the centre of the business telling us what needs to improve. But I can see a greater role which spreads to the communities in which we work. Residents are building skills and leading local improvements. Our LAPs voice local concerns and influence local politicians and local agencies. I think this should not be overlooked by policymakers. Maybe the time has come to throw down another gauntlet.
Key points

• The decline of consumer regulation and the ascendancy of economic regulation should not deter landlords from exploring new and innovative ways to engage with their residents.

• To achieve corporate turnaround AmicusHorizon embarked on a programme of resident and staff engagement. These two strands came together to form a ‘One Team’ culture.

• Resident engagement is not just ‘nice to do’. Done well it represents great business.

• Policy makers should look at the potential of resident governance models to enhance civic engagement and achieve big society principles.
New approaches to learning at and through work

By Jane Kettle and Judy Smith, Jay Consulting

Summary
As well as education/formal qualifications, the current and prior experiences of employees can help them to respond efficiently and flexibly to organisational demands. Work-based learning accredits or extends the skills and abilities of employees, so from an employer perspective, this means workforce development, or the upskilling and reskilling of an organisation’s employees. An organisational learning strategy should include tailored work-based learning with appropriate scaffolding for participants to derive maximum learning from their work. Employers suggest the higher level learning experience is strongly valued; this can be achieved through working with higher education institutions developing bespoke learning. The approach is usually experiential in nature, centred on the application of learning in the workplace and evidence-based assessment of progress and achievement.

Introduction
This article explores how housing learning can innovate, recognise and respond to changing occupational needs and patterns in the sector over the next 5-10 years. In this contribution we define work-based learning as a way of developing higher level skills, and explore why it can be an innovative and responsive way to develop knowledge, capability and understanding in the rapidly changing housing industry. Our focus is on higher level learning (Level 4 and above on the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF)) and we consider the changing relationships between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and housing organisations to highlight new routes to work-based learning.

Work-based learning – the context
In an employment sector subject to such change and flux as we see in the housing industry, there is a requirement for people to have the skills, knowledge and understanding to respond efficiently and flexibly to the demands placed on them. Their current and prior experiences, education and qualifications become increasingly important. It is generally recognised that many people working in housing already hold qualifications and skills achieved in a broad range of subjects. How organisations use
and develop these skills is important in terms of achieving business outcomes as well as addressing individual employee aspirations. This is where a learning strategy can become so important for an organisation. Work-based learning can be an effective strategy to deploy.

Work-based learning has a long tradition in some sectors, for example health care and retail, and some major employers (Tesco, Morrison, and Rolls Royce) have developed their own qualifications, designed, studied for and assessed in the work place, in partnership with a university.

Work-based learning is just one of the ways of packaging learning that takes place outside of a traditional taught course, led by a tutor, in a classroom setting. The emphasis is on learning in and for the workplace. The University Vocational Awards Council (UVAC) (2005) defines this as learning that 'may take many forms and be undertaken for a number of different purposes; it is not restricted to performance related learning in a narrow sense. Instead the emphasis is on identifying and demonstrating learning that has occurred through work-based activity wherever or however this may have been achieved'.

Work-based learning accredits or extends the workplace skills and abilities of employees, so from an employer perspective, this means workforce development, or the upskilling and reskilling of an organisation’s employees. ‘The learning is usually based on the needs of the individual’s career and employer, and can lead to nationally recognised qualifications’ but it also includes ‘learning that takes place at work as a normal part of development and problem-solving, in response to specific work issues, as a result of workplace training or coaching, or to further work-related aspirations and interests.’

Learning gained in this way has several advantages for the business. For example, the learning is largely done in the work place, with content mainly work-related, and so requires minimal release during working hours. This type of learning is more tailored to the precise needs of the organisation. The modes and pace of the learning involved can be negotiated and altered to suit needs and circumstances. It can be used to promote reflection on past experience such as implementing learning from in-house training. It can involve reflection on personal learning and professional development to improve practice and therefore organisational effectiveness.

One of the significant features of work-based learning is that it takes place in a context outside of a traditional learning environment, where the primary purpose is not actually
learning. However many business organisations do call themselves ‘learning organisations’. According to Peter Senge (1990:3) learning organisations are ‘organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together’.54

The creation of such a learning organisation does however require a willingness to create a structure or framework for the support of work-based learning. This is where there is a need for organisations to reflect on the place and space required for supported learning.

A fundamental question for any learning organisation is how to derive the best outcome for the business from employees who are knowledgeable practitioners and to enable the employees themselves to derive optimum value from learning for work. The learning strategy therefore requires access to different types of learning for meeting different employee requirements and for recruiting and retaining staff. Learning needs to be associated with meaningful work and input into the job roles by the employee. There is evidence that learning becomes more effective when more employees take part in workplace decisions about the design of job roles. Brown (2009) summarises these as the key processes involved in higher skills development at work and includes:

- Engagement with challenging work.
- Interactions at work.
- Knowledge at work.
- Self-directed learning at work.
- Identities at work.
- Supporting the learning of others.55

These issues are pertinent in such a dynamic industry as housing when anticipating future changes in occupational needs and patterns in the industry.

**Planning and managing work-based learning – practical considerations**

Establishing a work-based programme of learning, needs careful planning and management with systems, processes and academic support providing the scaffolding for participants to derive maximum learning from their work. The examples below provide some information about the range of tools and techniques available.
This does require the learner or employee to be able to reflect robustly on their work. The approach is usually experiential in nature, centred on the application of learning in the workplace and evidence-based assessment of progress and achievement. It can involve problem solving, carrying out specific projects, group or team working, and action learning sets. It has been suggested that the learning outcome to be desired from every learner, regardless of the programme they are following, is that of the reflective practitioner, equipped with the skills for life-long learning. The outcomes of rigorous reflective practice for professionals are considered to include the abilities to critique their practice, to identify their own learning needs and to take responsibility for continuing their professional development.

An effective work-based learning strategy for the development of higher level skills requires employers to work closely with education providers/professional organisations. We note that developments in work-based learning for housing are happening at the same time as the delivery of more traditional housing education in universities is undergoing a rapid change, indeed decline. This can partly be accounted for by the changing fee regime and the removal of grant funding for courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. The combination of much higher tuition fees in higher education and major challenges such as welfare reform and the affordable rents regime for housing organisations, makes funding and supporting higher education for housing professionals as challenging as it has ever been.

Developing work-based learning is one way of harnessing the knowledge, skills and understanding that can be derived from a higher level programme of study. The Higher Education Academy (HEA) commissioned research and supported a workshop at Leeds Metropolitan University on 7th April 2012 to explore employer demand and curriculum development in housing at HE level. Discussions with employers suggested the higher level learning experience is strongly valued. Employers want to capture in a structured way how services and polices might be developed and improved as a result of the challenge of learning at this level. It was also asserted that there is a need to develop people with the vision needed to respond to changing contexts and markets and the changing role of housing managers. Developing higher level skills is essential to grow a critical mass of change agents that can ‘turn big ships around’.

The focus on work-related learning lends itself to the creation of learning ‘programmes’ and pathways that are developed in a flexible manner including content that can be created by the individual housing practitioner in partnership with the learning provider. Continuing Professional Development can also be achieved through accredited and
non-accredited work-based learning and training. One development in recent years has been the foundation degree, a vocationally orientated award characterised by employer involvement in its design and delivery. There is a sustained interest in these qualifications as some other skills sectors look to develop higher level apprenticeships that meet sector demand for technician roles and higher level skills at sub-graduate level.

Work-based learning – learning from practice

We now present three examples of housing-related work-based learning initiatives.

**Foundation Degree in the Management of Social and Affordable Housing**

Anglia Ruskin University runs this course which is accredited by CIH. It has been designed in consultation with employers with no assumptions made about content, delivery or location within the university disciplines. The learning themes include personal effectiveness, management skills, legislative and organisational change and managing customers and clients. Learners have access to the university’s virtual learning environment. There are two optional workshops per year, but the course is delivered entirely online. The intention is that organisations will benefit by being able to build on existing skills and knowledge in order to deliver their own vision. The learning will enhance workforce flexibility, and increase any organisation’s ability to respond to change. Such learning will also contribute to talent management programmes and succession planning initiatives. Individual learners will build on their skills and knowledge to improve their own personal performance.57

**Learning Pathways for Housing Practitioners, University of Chester**

The Learning Pathways for Housing Practice programme is located within the larger Work Based and Integrative Studies (WBIS) framework. At the University of Chester this enables the delivery of self-paced and negotiable learning which can be tailored to the needs of individual learners and organisations. The project received funding from the North West Universities Association’s Higher Level Skills Pathfinder Project, to develop employer demand-led education and it allows people in the sector to access a range of flexible self paced modules which are directly linked to their work-based practice.

The stakeholder partners come from a variety of organisations from across the North West including the, Dane Group, Chester & District Housing Trust, Meres & Mosses Housing Association, Weavervale Housing Trust, Wulvern Housing Ltd and Whiteheads Solicitors. The Professional Certificate in Housing Management Law has been developed jointly by the University of Chester and Whiteheads Solicitors. A coaching module, the Principles, Processes and Skills of Coaching, has been designed to improve
business/organisational performance, and individual learners’ competence and team performances in the workplace. Leading and Managing People is intended for professional practitioners who find themselves assuming greater management and leadership responsibilities without having received any formal management training and education.

Learners can access taught elements at workshops or online and at distance but it is possible that programmes could primarily (and almost exclusively) entail work-based projects, allowing organisations to negotiate their own pathways of learning related to their area(s) of working practice.58

Both the examples described above lead to an academic qualification. Below is an example of a route to the CIH Chartered Membership.

**CIH Work-Based Learning Programme**

Successful completion of the CIH Work Based Learning programme is different in that it leads to eligibility for Chartered Membership. This experiential route is a new, higher level qualification that is significantly different from traditional provision for housing learning and development. Its main feature is that learners will produce evidence of knowledge, skills and understanding that are directly related to their own professional context. It is focused specifically on learning derived in the workplace. In response to the changing framework for the provision of homes and the delivery of services, CIH has developed this new route to CIH Chartered Membership which aims to recognise knowledge and experience wherever it has been gained. This route is more tailored to individual learners. It recognises the diversity of experience housing professionals bring to the sector and offers a flexible framework for learning which allows housing professionals to provide evidence of the knowledge, skills, understanding and experience that they have gathered from a variety of contexts, but particularly at work. In other words, this is a work-based, experiential programme that will be delivered to cohorts, using blended learning techniques, but without a formal curriculum. It is a new, more flexible way to get professionally qualified. The experiential route will provide structure and support, and some opportunities for engaging with other housing professionals following the programme. Overall this programme requires learning through the experience of work.

People taking this course design a learning contract with the support of a tutor, and submit their portfolio of evidence through Word Press. This means that they can use a variety of methods, including blogging, video, oral accounts as well as written documents.
When learners complete this programme successfully they will have demonstrated that their knowledge, skills and understanding of the professional housing context meet the requirements for Chartered Membership of CIH.

**Key points**

- Housing organisations will, over the next decade, be influenced by the economic, regulatory, and social contexts in which they operate.
- They will need to understand and be responsive to the form and content of learning that will enhance organisational performance.
- The current and prior experiences, education and qualifications of people working in the housing industry will become increasingly important; and how housing organisations use and develop these skills will be crucial in terms of achieving business outcomes as well as addressing individual employee aspirations.
- Work-based learning can accredit and extend the skills and abilities of employees and so support workforce development.
- The boundaries between work places and learning places are blurring rapidly; and formal, structured and well-planned work-based learning will assume greater importance.
Learning from Gentoo – becoming an ‘employer of choice’

By Pat Havord, Head of Learning; Julie Kelly, Assistant Chief Executive; and Lisette Nicholson, Head of People Management at Gentoo

Summary
Gentoo is an investor in people, property and the planet. Its primary resource, now and in the future, are its people – customers, staff and partners. It needs, therefore, to be the ‘employer of choice’ and secure lifelong relationships with staff who live and share its values. This requires the right ‘psychological contract’ between employer and employee that is a two way deal: Gentoo is committed to providing working experiences of value to both parties and enable staff access to a ladder of learning opportunities. This relationship extends to customers, partners and future stakeholders.

Introducing Gentoo
At Gentoo we aim to make a positive mark on the future by investing in people, the planet and in property. We consist of a number of divisions delivering a wide portfolio of products and services. Our beliefs and approach are encapsulated in our ‘Vision, Mission and Values’ outlined below:

• Vision – to improve the ‘art of living’ beyond imagination. The ‘art of living’ is our ambition to ‘improve the lives of the people, communities and the environment in which we operate by investing in people, the planet and property’.

• Mission – we generate wealth by improving the lives of our customers and re-invest this wealth in passionate people by creating a climate for personal and collective growth and opportunity.

• Values:
  – Believe nothing is impossible.
  – Re-imagine the future.
  – Cultivate a learning curiosity.
  – Live authentic relationships.
  – Give us all you’ve got.

This article illustrates our beliefs as an organisation, our approach to people as an employer, how this impacts on our business planning; and how we develop our staff to meet today’s challenges and to respond positively to the challenges of the future.
1. Becoming an employer of choice

In order to meet our vision we need to recruit, develop, support and liberate talented people by becoming their employer of choice. This requires the right ‘psychological contract’ with those who work with us or may consider working for us. There are three elements to this psychological contract:

• Firstly, people who are interested and passionate about what they are trying to achieve will put far more of their individual resource into their daily work and engaging with customers. Dan Pink’s book, ‘Drive – the surprising truth about what motivates us’ shows that, apart from very simple, mechanistic work, giving people the freedom to create and use all their qualities, is more important than money as the principal motivator in the ‘contract’.

• Secondly, our people-based business has learning at its core. We believe in what we call ‘the perfectibility of human kind’ by which we mean that every individual has the potential to continuously develop and approach what Maslow calls ‘self actualisation’. Learning becomes the key to entering the world of self fulfilment once basic needs are met and confidence and self esteem are built. The organisation’s part of the contract is to provide the culture and the ladder of learning opportunities which enable individuals to achieve this.

• Thirdly, the closer our people can get to self-actualisation through our development strategy (see point 3 below) the greater our capacity to be ‘agile’ as a business will be. We describe the ‘agility’ of our people and our business in terms of having the capacity to do things in, say, five years time that we haven’t even dreamt of yet. Agility enables us to prosper in a world that is changing at an accelerating rate. Building confidence and freedom from the fear of failure are vital ingredients of this approach.

At Gentoo, our values are key to this two way psychological contract – everything we do and, vitally, the way we do it. So when our staff give us all they’ve got (by which we mean using all of their talents, personalities, interests and passions) as well as their knowledge and skills, to work with customers, they can expect a lot from us in return.

We strive, therefore, to provide work experiences that are of value to individual staff, our business and our customers. Aligning business needs and staff needs in leading and managing our work is essential to our success. This requires us to not only know what our customers need and want, to improve their ‘art of living’, but to know our staff and Board members equally well. This is not some quaint or soft hearted construct.
Our organisation holds people accountable in a fair way. It challenges them in a respectful way. It runs its business through them but our values and culture are not negotiable. This applies to recruitment, to performance management, to supplier relationships, to governance, leadership and management.

These fundamental constructs not only underpin the authentic relationships between Board members, leaders, managers and staff; they also inform the way we work with customers. This, in turn, informs how we will develop in the future (see point 4 below).

Our relationships with customers are individual. They evolve and change as their ‘art of living’ does. The basis of the relationship is that it is dynamic not static. It is neither a traditional landlord/tenant relationship nor a dependant care worker one. In her book ‘HelpLess – its time to stop pleading and start leading’ Paula McCormack warns of the dangers of producing even greater levels of dependency in the very communities we are trying to make sustainable in the long term. In a time of profound changes to the benefit system, public sector spending, the fabric of society, the global economy and the environment, the way we work with our customers, as well as what we do, is even more crucial than it has been to date.

Sometimes it is easy to do things to and for people (with the best of intentions) rather than with them. This will not lead to independence let alone self-actualisation. It follows that customers need to benefit from our learning agenda in the same way as staff.

We will support and work with customers to enable them to improve their ‘art of living’ but by working with them to achieve greater independence. We also believe they will be motivated and respond to our opportunities to work with others to do the same. We believe and have evidence to show that by creating the right climate in a learning community, people will add value without necessarily expecting a monetary return.

A business model based upon these relationships rather than the traditional fiscal one is able to create a further human resource (through customers) to enable us to do more without a corresponding increase in costs.

2. The business

Gentoo is a profit-for-purpose organisation. Profit is re-invested to support bespoke services and products to improve the ‘art of living’. A rigorous business planning process underpins all of our companies, whatever activities they undertake. Four principles underpin our business planning approach. They provide the link between the
development and growth of the business and the way we work with our people through our psychological contract. These principles are:

- **Cultural alignment** – The activities of the Group will be aligned to the Group’s culture strategy and ‘Culture Well’ (see below) and will be driven by transformational leaders and experienced by inspired and empowered people.

- **Brand strength** – The Group has built a strong brand and the Group’s activities must operate within and look to enhance the Gentoo brand. Brand strength will be underpinned by quality, innovation and service excellence across the whole of the Gentoo offer.

- **Customer focused products and services** – The Group’s offer to current and potential customers will be built around their requirements and aspirations and will give customers an excellent experience in all of their relationships with Gentoo.

- **Profitable, sustainable and scalable business model** – The offers that the Group bring to the market will operate within the framework of the Group business model, be capable of growth, be financially sustainable and operate within value for money and robust risk management procedures.

This gives a structure for clear target setting and sets out the parameters for what is expected from each company in return for the Group’s investment. Our commercial operations generate profit for re-investment and this supports our ‘art of living’ companies who utilise these resources to achieve our mission. Our values are the same for all parts of the Group structure.

This enables flexibility of operation by each company, but the way they engage with all stakeholders – current and future – is governed and driven by our values. We expect that staff will bring their whole personality to work and fully engage and we support this by giving them respect, value and opportunities. This is characterised by our approach to equality and diversity that has earned the Group second place in the 2013 Stonewall Workplace Equality Index⁶² and 21st place in The Times Top 100 companies to work for.

We have aligned the learning agenda and the way we work with people to our business and financial performance in a number of ways. These include:

- **Culture Well** – a model that articulates our approach to developing a consistent culture.

- **Leadership Model** – sets the framework for required qualities in leaders.

- **Leadership Quest** – 10 challenges to our leaders.
• **360 Appraisal** – the tool that measures individuals in the context of our 10 challenges to leaders.

• **GenDex** – measures all elements of Gentoo’s activities and combines them into a score.

• **Re-Imagine** – our system to harness creative ideas and innovation.

• **The Orange Box** – a small group working with the Chief Executive’s personal agenda.

### 3. Our people learning agenda

Gentoo’s approach to learning is distinctive in three ways:

• Firstly, we envisage a lifelong approach to learning that can begin at the pre-employment stage and continue after retirement. For example, we have programmes connecting primary, secondary, post-school and graduate students to the culture and world of business. Our Academy 360 (our all through academy for 4 – 16 year olds) delivers a carousel of experiences as part of the curriculum that enables students to participate in and learn about our culture. This year, a minimum of 400 primary students will go through our ‘BE’ programme, a self help programme to build resilience and self awareness.

• Secondly, we are building a learning ladder to provide a progression of opportunities for individuals to develop themselves, gain qualifications, achieve self-actualisation and gain the skills to help other do the same. Natasha Greaves provides an example of how this approach works. Natasha came to us as a Supported Apprentice two weeks short of her eighteenth birthday. Her experience at school and college had not been great. She became a trainee and then an Administrative Assistant and now, aged 21, she is a Project Assistant. Natasha says ‘I know I’ve experienced the ‘art of living’ with Gentoo and I want to pass on my experience so others can benefit’.

• Thirdly, our learning programmes are designed to be self generating as Natasha’s story indicates. Whoever participates in our learning programmes (be they customers, staff, Board members, retirees, or students, etc) can take part in our coaching and mentoring programmes. These programmes have already given us a resource of 88 people to further support others. This is the basis for our future development.

### 4. Our future focus

The combination of investment in learning and relationship building based upon shared values, gives us an expandable, flexible and adaptable human resource both now and for the future. The value of our people can continue way beyond our initial engagement
with them. This enables us to build learning communities and to promote and facilitate improvements in the ‘art of living’. Alongside our commercial developments this approach will bring further investment capacity to the Group. These learning communities can produce new currencies based upon exchange and mutuality: individuals can trade their skills, experience and knowledge with each other but also work together for collective gain. We are currently researching these alternatives and how we will develop them.

We are now working with our supply chain and like minded partners to explore how we can work with them to extend our people strategy to a greater number of individuals. This work has begun with apprenticeships and our pre-employment programmes.

Our ‘Orange Box’ group (see above) has recently examined how we can further enhance the use of our extended human resource by developing the type of momentum which characterised the ‘Civil Rights’ movements of the 1960s, for example:

• We have used social media to achieve society change overseas. We are currently harnessing support for our URHU project in Africa to replace the use of kerosene lamps for health and environmental improvement.

• A recent meeting with 69 of our suppliers on apprenticeships began by exploring a vision of the part they could all play in eradicating youth unemployment in the North East. We believe young people can also make a contribution to this cause themselves by working with us.

The pursuit of these cause-based projects will form the next steps for us. We see it as a way to increase our operations and expand our business, to build upon our mission and values; and to meet the societal and economic challenges of the future.

**Key points**

• Values drive Gentoo’s business.
• People are its primary resource.
• Work must be of value to staff and the business.
• Invest constantly in staff.
• New ways of working with customers will provide future human resources to achieve our vision.
Supporting and maximising stakeholder involvement – learning from Community Gateway Association

By Diane Bellinger, Chief Executive of Community Gateway Association

Summary
The Community Gateway Model aims to give tenants and leaseholders more control over their homes and living environment. It is based on the principle that rights to influence the running of the organisation are built into the structure of the organisation and its governance. Supporting active involvement requires a commitment to skills development on the part of the organisation and personal development on the part of involved tenants and leaseholders.

About Community Gateway Association
In November 2005 Community Gateway Association (CGA) came into existence with the transfer of 6,500 homes from Preston City Council. This was the first tenant-member owned housing association in the country – the product of a model developed out of the co-operative movement. While one track of the model saw communities identifying their own priorities for improving their neighbourhoods, the second (equally important) provided for tenants and leaseholders, only, to become members of the Association and be in a position to make key decisions about the running of CGA. Only members can vote at the company’s AGM. Tenants and leaseholders are the biggest group on the Board and the 30 strong Gateway Tenants’ Committee (GTC) is a central part of our governance structure, second only to the Board.

Skills development for involved customers
What this means is that involved customers have significant responsibilities and significant development requirements. Developing necessary capacity is a constant concern for us all at CGA. But seeing it happen and hearing the stories of those who accept the challenge is also one of the greatest rewards. Over the past 12 months the development of all our people (residents, colleagues and non-executives) has been a key area of focus for Gateway. During this time we have introduced the ‘Purple Pathways’ Programme – five approaches to learning for the different groups of people we support – our staff, our Board, the GTC, tenants and residents; and apprentices.
We are also quite convinced that the influence and decision-making powers that our tenants exercise support our drive for high performing services. In our time as a new housing association, performance throughout the organisation has significantly improved. Given that all our services have attendant sub-groups of the GTC, the resident influence in our approach to service-provision is strongly embedded.

Our membership model does not require tenants to be officers or representatives of a tenant group so the whole ‘meeting’ context is one continual learning experience.

**A personal case in point**

Quite often the development that our involved tenants have to make is personal, even bordering on what we professionals might think mundane. But for people whose lives have been rooted in their local community these development steps represent giant leaps.

Our current acting Chair is a good example of this. Irene does not have a background in tenant activism. She was simply interested enough to join CGA as a member. From there she attended one of our membership workshops where we run ‘open’ sessions to gather the membership’s view on topics of interest to the organisation. The usual facilitation method of breaking into smaller groups ensued and each table was asked to consider a question then feedback. When it came to the turn of Irene’s group there was a lot of looking around for a volunteer, followed by lots of ‘I-can’t-speak-in-public’ mutterings from Irene. But with encouragement, she did deliver (and delivered well) a summary of what ‘her’ group thought. Next, she was ‘talent-spotted’ by our empowerment team and quite quickly she progressed through applications for the GTC, time on the Committee, standing for election to Board and a position as one of the seven tenant Board Members (or a Board Member who is a tenant, as we prefer it). Sadly, our current Chair has had a long period of illness so we have looked for a temporary stand-in – *step-up Irene*! Her time in the acting position has included an assessment visit from our Regulation Manager – with Irene demonstrating assurance, control and inclusivity in her role.

At the stage of not believing she could speak in public at that initial workshop, Irene would never have imagined she would now be enrolled on her first train-the-trainer qualification! Alongside four other tenants, Irene is currently completing the Level 3 Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS), part of her preparation for...
becoming actively involved in delivering training for her peers and other volunteers as part of ‘Purple Pathways’.

It’s a difficult place for members of the community – to be around a table, running a company, alongside the professionals and politicians with all of their experience and achievable development opportunities. We provide our Board Members with formal training (externally and internally sourced) and much of this training is undertaken by tenants. We also try to be careful about our style of presentation and use of language – our finance team always give open workshops on the accounting reports outside of the Board meeting. And then there is the question of supporting confidence to contribute within the formal setting of Board. This puts responsibility on the non-tenant Members to be inclusive and accepting – not for us any suggestion that tenants serve on ‘operations committee’ with the Board the preserve of a ‘professional elite’!

The ‘Purple Pathways’ Programme

Our ‘Purple Pathways’ Programme was developed to bring the overall ethos of Gateway into learning and development. We describe the development process as ‘Pathways’ because this process fundamentally represents a journey through learning with a progressive focus on training, career development and talent management. Through the Pathways we help all of our people to identify a ‘destination’ (a goal) and we create an individual route for them to guide their journey so they can achieve that outcome.

So why do we call our Pathways ‘Purple’? Well, purple is the main colour of our logo, uniforms and livery. But it is more than that to us. Purple is the colour of transformational change. It is bold and distinctive – to us purple is an attitude. Purple people think laterally and they find new ways to communicate and involve others. This is about our culture – being true to our values and committed to our vision – not just about what we are doing, but the way we are going to do it.

Each Pathway has been designed in partnership with the group it has been created for. Group members identify gaps in their current skills and then we provide opportunities for them to develop even further in the future. Each Pathway is really tailored to the needs of the group. ‘Purple Pathways’ have been structured so that it is not just a list of training outputs or a course directory. The Pathway highlights key areas of focus so it can be embedded into the organisation in the longer term. The training we actually deliver sits behind, giving us the ability to change specific courses and learning opportunities as needed. This can be illustrated in the diagram overleaf.
Skills development for employment

Then there are those whose involvement with CGA has helped them with their own employment needs. We have a long-serving Board Member who has, after a long period out of the work environment, found a role with a tenant involvement organisation. Perhaps this is to be expected from an organisation with a tenant empowerment focus; but there are further examples of people who have developed in unrelated fields. This is where our organisation has to take an approach that is flexible and ‘unselfish’ – committed to supporting individuals develop. We have those, like Jenny, who came to us in response to ‘Purple Pathways’. She was looking to move jobs and saw employment with CGA as achieving that ambition. Unfortunately she was unsuccessful in that but it introduced her to volunteering with us. So now she is a GTC member and potentially more. And she has also now moved jobs. All-in-all, Jenny and CGA are mutually supporting each other.

We also have to be open to all within our communities. Homeowner, Fay brought her children to an activity day run by one of our community groups. At the time working part-time in a factory, Fay had no record of involvement in the local community. But that initial contact led to her joining the group and getting involved with various activities.
Two years later, she is treasurer of the group and has changed jobs. She now works in the local school, where she is a staff governor, and is currently extending her role there to become involved in classroom teaching whilst acquiring related qualifications. Fay has also successfully attracted a variety of funding to allow the community group to extend their activities.

The key to our approach is the acceptance among the professional circle that the involvement of tenants at all levels of the organisation is critical to its success. It leads to that group accepting their role in coaching, mentoring, developing and including the involved members of the community. The organisation has to believe that this involvement results in a high-performing body, delivering what its customers want. And, consequently, we have to put resources into the development of individuals and groups with many and differing needs. When considering stakeholder involvement specifically, we are committed to providing the right training for stakeholders’ own personal development and for the development of the skills they need to increase their involvement and impact within Gateway.

**Taking a personalised approach to personal development**

The central ‘Purple Pathways’ concept of identifying an individual’s own path recognises that no two people bring the same experience, skills or personal behaviours with them to Gateway. As such, the support and development they receive should be as individual as they are. It is not unique to offer Personal Development Plans, however the ‘Purple Pathways’ focus on the destination; and the path to it avoids a fixed route of following standard training courses or a set calendar of training events. Our approach is not a ‘one size fits all’ approach of mandatory or reactive training nor does it limit learning opportunities to current or work-based requirements. We truly believe that our Members and volunteers should gain the most personal growth from working with us. Our approach extends beyond an expectation that stakeholders should give something back and it is definitely more than a ‘pink and fluffy’ approach to personal development. We believe that by developing our people they become more competent and confident in the work they do with us. This in turn builds loyalty and credibility within the GTC and Board; and it increases aspirations and employability within our communities.

Through ‘Purple Pathways’ we empower each of our people to take ownership for their own development – led by them, not done to them. Our ‘Purple Passports’ allow them to focus on their own areas for growth and to plan and track their development.
We are not happy just to provide opportunities for skills development, we are also highly focused on helping learners achieve recognisable outcomes. We provide opportunities for learners to achieve nationally recognised qualifications through each path. For example, as part of Irene’s development, she completed an ILM-accredited Governance qualification. At the ‘passing-out’ celebration dinner, which was attended by 150 people, including NHF-chief, David Orr, Irene volunteered to speak on behalf of all the graduates, writing and delivering her own words! This was a transformational achievement.

But outside of the framework for corporate development are the personal development achievements – and Irene gives an insight into this with her confession to me that until working with Gateway she had never travelled to London on the train on her own – her own gold medal!

Key points

• The involvement of tenants at all levels of the organisation is critical to the success of CGA. This is why CGA provides a range of opportunities to support personal development.

• The Community Gateway model means that involved customers have significant responsibilities in ensuring the success of the organisation, but this also means they have significant development requirements.

• Because no two people bring the same experience, skills or personal behaviours with them to CGA, any support and development they receive should be as individual as they are.

• The ‘Purple Pathways’ programme is based on the principle that CGA will empower our people to take ownership of their own development. This is led by them. It is not something which is done to them. Our people are active learners.

• By developing our people they become more competent and confident in the work they do with us but this also has a personal transformational effect, raising their aspirations and improving their opportunities within our communities.
Wolverhampton Homes supporting the community through local employment and training

By Shaun Aldis, Director of Property Services at Wolverhampton Homes

Summary

Wolverhampton Homes has always been passionate about ‘making a difference’ in the communities in which we work. Wolverhampton Homes has worked within the network of Skills Academy projects and has demonstrated its ability to deliver training and employment interventions across a range of outputs from schools engagement, work placements, apprenticeships, NVQs and business development. This article illustrates some of our outstanding achievements, transforming life and work opportunities for individuals living in our communities.

About the Wolverhampton Decent Homes partnership

Wolverhampton Homes was contracted alongside three construction partners to deliver Decent Homes improvements in Wolverhampton. However, due to high unemployment levels and poor attrition rates of school leavers in the area, Wolverhampton Homes was keen to provide a value added element to this work by ‘supporting the community through local employment and training’. To support this goal, we applied for National Skills Academy for Construction (NSAfC) status. The NSAfC is delivered by CITB, the Sector Skills Council for the construction industry and is a project-based training concept tailored to helping clients and contractors develop the right skills on site. Wolverhampton Homes was successful in its bid which became effective from July 2008 and reached completion in June 2012.

All members of the partnership were committed to improving the skills bases of our workforce and to providing employment and development opportunities for local people in the Wolverhampton area. The broad scope of the programme has offered wide ranging opportunities for training and employment, which has helped to realise our vision that ‘success comes from people’.

NSAfC status has helped us raise the profile of our efforts with local politicians and people. It has also enabled us to place greater emphasis on improving the skills level of the existing workforce through the supply chain. Additionally, it has opened doors to
sources of funding or concessionary fees for training for our people. This article will illustrate in more detail what we have been able to achieve for community skills development in the Wolverhampton area through our involvement with the NSAfC and it shows how, in delivering major capital programmes, value added, multi-faceted and community focused gains can be built into the process.

**Our major value added achievements for communities in Wolverhampton**

The achievement of NSAfC status and targets arising from this were overseen by a Project Co-ordinator whose sole role was to work on developing employment and training activities. This was achieved partly through the use of an Employment and Skills Plan (ESP) which was reviewed quarterly and audited once a year by Construction Skills. Some key achievements were as follows:

- **Performance + Programme** – 12 Companies including 24 delegates across the partnership signed up to take part in this six month programme focusing on business improvement and management training. Delegates had the opportunity to achieve NVQ Level 4 and Level 5 qualifications in management.

- **Women at Work Programme** – Wolverhampton Homes secured funding to deliver coaching and networking sessions for women working on the project, this included management training. 14 individuals from across the project have taken part.

- **Diversity training** – Through external partners we offered diversity training to companies working on the project.

- **Future Jobs Fund placements** – These posts were specifically for individuals from the worklessness group. Individuals had their first six months employment funded.

- **Apprentices** – Apprentices were recruited, supported through our partnership with Construction Skills and City of Wolverhampton College. Funding was available for young people aged 16 to 18 years. A total of 17 apprentices were taken on in the 2010/2011 intake.

- **Ambassadors** – Training was made available for our existing workforce supported by Construction Skills funding. Fully trained ambassadors then delivered careers talks and activities to local schools and learning centres.

- **Work experience, site visits and curriculum support** – A range of opportunities were offered to local schools and learning centres to support the development of pupils and students. In addition to this local schools were engaged in an eco-project which won a National Energy Action Award.

- **Wolverhampton University and College** – Partnerships were put in place to offer support and practical experience to graduates and undergraduates.
• **Small business support** – Working in partnership with Construction Skills, Business Link and West Midlands Centre for Construction Excellence (WMCCE), we supported local businesses working with us by offering training support and guidance.

Wolverhampton Homes and its partners have also been involved in various careers open days at local schools and colleges. As part of the Skills Academy Status, we arranged various events to increase awareness of opportunities available in construction and housing. This increased the understanding of the construction industry amongst non-traditional, diverse groups. Some examples are detailed below:

• **Women in construction event** – This was held at the Black Country Museum and was attended by four teams of girls aged between 14 and 16 offering them a taste of careers in construction. The students were given an architect’s design brief for the conversion of one of the existing buildings on the Museum site. All four teams participated enthusiastically and arrived at realistic, and in some cases, innovative solutions.

• **Celebrating our trainees awards ceremony** – 20 trainees, apprentices and students were presented with awards at a prestigious awards ceremony organised by Wolverhampton Homes at The Molineux. The individuals were all employed through the Wolverhampton Decent Homes programme and had either learnt a trade or skill themselves or had supported training opportunities for others in areas such as plumbing, carpentry, painting and decorating, surveying and contracts management.

• **Construction trade taster day** – Organised by Wolverhampton Homes and Carillion, the event targeted at 15 and 16 year-olds, aimed to get them interested in a career in construction and help them develop their practical skills.

• **Bilston careers fair** – Wolverhampton Homes along with its Decent Homes contractors supported the Bilston careers event to provide careers/employment opportunities, along with advice and guidance.

• **Teachers Event** – In partnership with the Education Business Partnership (EBP), we hosted this event for teachers and careers advisors from schools across the city. With the aim of increasing their awareness and understanding of the industry; and to share best practice on how the project could impact effectively with local schools.

**Demonstrating a commitment to apprentices and trainees**

The partnership has been committed to providing opportunities to individuals from a range of backgrounds including those local people falling into the ‘workless’ group. This is why a range of opportunities have been provided by us using targeted events to identify local candidates from non-traditional groups.
The Decent Homes Partnership has recruited 76 apprentices and 28 trainees including students undertaking university placements, Future Jobs Fund trainees and adult trainees. These apprentices and trainees have been placed with construction partners or offered opportunities through their supply chains.

**Working in partnership for community development**

In partnership with the local authority, we have delivered to city wide groups, namely the City Wide Employment Training Group and the Cross Developers Forum. These link us with other construction projects (such as Building Schools for the Future (BSF)) in the Wolverhampton area. This supports the deployment of apprentices between projects to enable them to gain broad practical experience in a range of contexts which helps them to gain their qualifications. The Head of HR Strategy and Organisational Development and Project Coordinator led this process for our Decent Home Project. Other key benefits of this type of partnership working have included:

1. Improving value for money for employers, funding agencies and clients so that existing funding is more focused on identified training and development needs and that the Academy generates real returns to the industry and the UK economy in the medium to longer term.

2. Ensuring that syllabi offered by training providers fit with ‘real-life’ skills needed on actual projects. There will be a need to review skills needs as they change and to support local people to develop changing skills.

3. Ensuring sustainable employment in local communities by working with the local authority and Job Centre Plus and embracing initiatives such as local employer partnerships.

4. Raising training standards so that individuals are provided with high quality fit for purpose learning and development that meets the needs of employers to deliver the project.

5. Establishing construction projects as learning and development centres, suited to the conditions of the modern construction industry, for the entire project team and the broader community.

6. Higher performing workplaces that contribute to consistent delivery of construction projects to quality, time and cost.
Supporting young people and adults with learning difficulties and with individuals who are disengaged with mainstream schooling

The Timken Centre provides opportunities for young people and adults with learning difficulties and with individuals who are disengaged with mainstream schooling. Additionally the Centre worked with the then Primary Care Trust which also referred clients. Our work with the Timken Centre has included:

- Mentoring the development of a sustainable social enterprise at the Centre called Sunbeam Enterprises.
- Delivery of fencing assembly including provision of recognised training and development opportunities.
- Fundraising activities.
- Provision of business plan diversification support.

Wolverhampton Homes achieving added social value

The principal benefit of our partnerships and our community focused approach to facilitating training and employment opportunities, has been the ability for Wolverhampton Homes to achieve a number of our key social goals. Over 30 per cent of the workforce employed by the partnership has been drawn from within the City boundaries and over 15 per cent of the workforce have been supported to recognised training courses during the course of the partnership. We have also increased the percentage of women employed as part of the workforce from 6 per cent to 10 per cent over the last three years through our ‘Women in Construction’ events. These are transformational achievements for our communities.

NSAfC status has given Wolverhampton Homes credibility in achieving our vision of providing sustainable communities, through the development and establishment of career progression within our supply chain and partnership working. The academy has also provided a vehicle for channelling local people, including our tenants, into work experience and provides opportunities to obtain a permanent position within the construction industry.

Skills development for the future – where next for Wolverhampton Homes?

The intensity and enthusiasm generated throughout the project has inspired tenants and staff at Wolverhampton Homes to create LEAP (Learning Education Achievement Programme). The objective is to assist our tenants, leaseholders and their families to secure work related skills, training, and experience. Its aim is to combat high levels of
unemployment in Wolverhampton. The LEAP team work closely with Job Centre Plus, the National Apprentice Service and have recently signed an Apprenticeship Charter with the TUC.

Key points

• A collaborative approach to skills development has directly supported and developed local communities and businesses in Wolverhampton.

• The biggest obstacles to promoting careers in construction lie in the low regard such careers seem to have in schools and also amongst some sections of our communities – specific interventions to address these factors have produced some successes.

• The employment and training aspirations of the partnership were complementary but could not have been delivered without the total buy-in of the construction partners and their staff and the full commitment of the Wolverhampton Homes Director of Property Services and Chief Executive. Top-level and strategic buy-in is vital to make employment and training initiatives a success.

• Early engagement with schools and the provision of business taster sessions are important to develop the workforce of the future.

• Celebrate success!
How mentoring and coaching broke the ‘glass ceiling’ at Genesis

By Kulbir Shergill, Head of Diversity and Inclusion at Genesis

Summary

Increasingly organisations are looking at proactive ways in which they can improve their diversity profile and become more inclusive employers. This is, because greater diversity and inclusivity opens doors to a richer seam of talent and expertise, improving business value and competitiveness. This article explores how Genesis used mentoring and coaching to develop the talent pipeline for senior management positions. The result was greater personal ownership of learning delivered in non-traditional ways.

The issues – why did we need a different approach?

Like many other housing organisations we employed a lot of women (60 per cent) but few of them were in senior positions. Clearly their numbers in the sector indicated that they liked working in housing but somehow the ‘glass ceiling’ was double glazed when it came to promotion and climbing up the career ladder! Less than 16 per cent of chief executives of housing associations are women.

Gender equality at senior management levels became one of our diversity priorities. Our challenge lay in engaging men to support female staff in their career aspirations; after all they were the ones who would be making the hiring decisions and approving learning opportunities. So when we invited women from around the organisation to talk to us we also invited senior male managers and the male CEO to engage in the debate about what the barriers were and how we could use them to smash the ‘glass ceiling’. Managers also talked about what their role could be in supporting the organisation achieve its objective.

Like other housing organisations we ran learning and development programmes and had appraisals in place; but the persistent outcome was a majority male senior management team. Clearly we needed to do something different if we wanted a different outcome.
What women want

So what was it that women needed that was different from their male colleagues to help them progress? When we talked to women about their learning needs the response we got back was that learning needed was not on the technical aspects of housing; but rather issues such as how confident they felt in a meeting, and how well they influenced, felt able to negotiate and network. Mentoring was seen as being really important and the majority of women we talked to said that this was something that would benefit them.

Interestingly we know that networking is a big factor in career progression, research has shown that:

- A significant percentage of people in their current jobs got those jobs through someone they knew. In addition, critical information is obtained to perform a job effectively through networks.
- Individual sponsorship has a big influence on performance appraisal and people are promoted because of who they know and how socially confident they are.

Some important lessons needed to be learnt by women in the workplace about how we project ourselves and how we build strategic relationships; and develop supportive professional networks. There was also a message to leaders that they needed to wake up to the impact they have on others: inclusive leadership is critical to ensure that it is not just the same faces that are hired or promoted.

Studies carried out in England and Germany across a range of sectors have revealed some interesting characteristics about male and female networks. In general, women’s networks are more likely to consist of friends and family and 48 per cent of people in a woman’s networks are other women. They are also more fragile and harder to maintain. For men, only 18 per cent of individuals in their networks are women and male networks are generally perceived to have higher social capital. In addition, men are more likely to have more senior contacts.

There is a further layer to the diversity characteristics of professional networks. In addition, black and minority ethnic people are more likely to go through a formal process than white people to get a job; and once in an organisation are less likely to have access to information and people in the organisation than their white colleagues. Are we in the social housing sector any different?
**Personal development interventions we put in place at Genesis**

At Genesis we put into place a mentoring scheme. In addition, we ran a number of training sessions over a two year period for women in junior positions aspiring to become managers covering things like career planning, building confidence, delivering and receiving feedback and managing personal stress.

For more senior women, we identified slightly different issues and ran early evening seminars covering issues such as the ‘Power of Networking, Non-Executive Positions, Raising your Visibility and Career Planning Strategies’. *Which of us hasn’t walked into a room, and thought how do I get the most of this networking opportunity and not just end up feeling like a wall flower!* 

One might say (and many did) that these are things that men can struggle with also; but the sessions that we ran looked at the particular barriers and issues that women face in the workplace. The sessions provided a safe all female environment that allowed participants to discuss the issues that they faced and learn about the techniques they could apply to change situations to elicit more positive outcomes for them and their teams.

There was one other thing that came out of our discussions with women across the organisation – *they wanted a women’s network*. This took a little longer to come to life because this sparked quite a debate with support coming from both sexes – as well protests.

**What did we achieve at Genesis?**

The feedback from women who attended the learning programmes and took part in the mentoring scheme was really positive and women felt that they had contributed positively to job performance and to career development. The surprising thing was how important women felt that the networking opportunities were that the learning seminars provided. They gave staff a chance to meet colleagues from across the organisation and suddenly women were starting to learn about what each other did and who they needed to speak to in order to get things done. We are an organisation that works across a large geographical area and it is not always easy to meet other colleagues. Networking was clearly important not just to career progression (as evidenced by the research mentioned earlier) but also to improving performance and efficiency.
We now have a thriving Women’s Network that is running events that fuse fun (actually fun was important, I forgot to mention that) and learning. Women from all areas of the business come together, learn about each other’s work; and leave knowing who they need to contact to get the job done! We invite Board Members and senior women and provide the opportunity to network that many junior staff would not otherwise come across. This is a spin off from the main event which is a variety of learning seminars designed to help women fill the gap that the formal learning and development programmes do not touch upon. We have learnt why our personal brand is important and how we develop it and use it to help us promote ourselves in the workplace; but also to access the people and information that we need to improve our performance – and improving performance, of course, is the ultimate aim of any organisation’s learning and development programmes.

What we have are learning programmes, networking opportunities (oh and fun), that women through the network identify, organise and deliver – creating a different kind of learning environment and providing opportunities for women to evidence their leadership and organisational skills. This is about individuals taking responsibility and leading on their own learning needs.

**The future for learning at Genesis**

An individual has a responsibility to be strategic about their own career opportunities, be active in networking, be able to identify and approach who can support them, be able to discern who has social capital; and identify gaps in their social network and work to fill them.

Formal programmes such as coaching and mentoring are important but not enough on their own. Opportunities to learn about yourself and develop your relationships will be critical particularly in a world where more and more of us work remotely; if we go into the office we are hot-desking, perhaps not even in the same office. Our traditional office relationships are definitely being challenged. How we develop our learning through networks and formal learning are the keys to success.

And if you are a leader ask yourself how inclusive you are in your own networks and how do you provide opportunities for people to link with you? Who you know is important to the future of your organisation: *don’t miss the talent*. 
Key points

- Diverse organisations are more productive and innovative.
- Managing a diverse workforce means that when organisations are planning for learning and development, they need to take into account different ways in which different groups and individuals learn and develop.
- Mentoring is an essential compliment to training because it addresses more qualitative factors affecting how people perform in their role and it offers an individual and focused approach to professional development.
- The opportunity to develop professional networks is a key way of supporting individual professional development.
- Individuals too have a responsibility to be strategic about their own career opportunities and to take positive advantage of the opportunities employers provide for them.
- Who you know is important for the future of your organisation.
How Fabrick are gearing up to deliver on the sustainable neighbourhoods agenda over the next 5-10 years

By Allison Joynes, Organisation Development Manager, Fabrick Group

Summary

The housing industry is facing unprecedented change. Aligned with an economic climate of continued uncertainty and the withdrawing of many key services at a local level, it is perhaps understandable that some of our peers are retrenching their positions and refocusing their activities on core housing activities at a time when the needs of our customers are increasing. Fabrick, however, have taken a different view. We have acknowledged that there are a number of external factors that will directly impact upon our ability to deliver services at a level of quality that our residents deserve. We have taken account of that within our business plans, but, we have also recognised that there are many ways in which we can work in partnership with agencies in our neighbourhoods to ensure that we are making the best use of assets and the best use of the resources that are available. This can best be described as our approach to financial viability whilst also demonstrating the need to evidence social value outcomes and supporting sustainable neighbourhoods.

Preparing for change

As we prepared for the potential impact of welfare reform, knowing we had a good relationship with our local authority partners who were also about to lose resources, we took an honest look at how we delivered services to our neighbourhoods and the difference we were actually making. The structure, that had stood us in good stead as a social housing provider, was formed around housing management. We had housing managers supported by housing officers supported by administration staff. As such, and by default, the service had become process driven, acting reactively rather than proactively to demands placed upon it by customers. In fact, a systems thinking project confirmed that we were managing by exception and therefore only really providing a service to 20 per cent of our customers – those who either came to us, or whom we visited as a result of an tenancy issue (not paying rent and/ or housing benefit not in place, anti-social behaviour etc.) Proactive steps had to be taken to ensure that our structure was configured so the main focus of all staff working within neighbourhoods
was to re-engage with the silent 80 per cent of our tenants, to become more customer driven; and to take the opportunity to work with partners and other stakeholders in neighbourhoods, with a real focus on adding social value.

In the summer of 2012, we became aware that CIH were keen to work with housing providers on a project that was looking at ways of creating a framework for sustainable neighbourhoods. After an initial assessment of the project, it became very clear that what we were trying to achieve was very much aligned with this project and we duly volunteered to take part. CIH challenged us to consider what actually happened in our neighbourhoods, as well as what made them good places to live or not. CIH also asked us to assess and understand where our role began and where it ended and what gaps were left. For example, we may tackle anti-social behaviour but only to a certain point before it is passed to the police, who would then take it on using a different set of policies and procedures, leading to a disjointed approach to many neighbourhood issues.

New skills for a new neighbourhood approach

As we looked to restructure our housing management teams into neighbourhood management teams, we concentrated our efforts on creating new neighbourhood assistant positions. This approach aimed to better support neighbourhood officers as they engaged with the various agencies in each of the neighbourhoods that they served. This was a different approach from the original desk based administrator that had been in place previously and we set about ensuring that those recruited to this new role wanted to make a real difference, were passionate about people and communities and aspired to have a long term career in housing. In order to get the right people we adopted a behavioural competency based approach to the recruitment process. We looked for behaviours that were customer focused, engaging and inspiring; along with leadership qualities that would allow for a team of people who thought in new and innovative ways. Resources were set aside to ensure that we could follow this up with a comprehensive training and mentoring plan for the staff once in post.

A good few months since implementing the new structure this new neighbourhood assistant role has, in the first instance, allowed us to focus our training programme on sustaining neighbourhoods. This has meant that, as well as the usual on the job training, we have been able to build on the competencies at selection and have concentrated on training and learning that is not process driven but is aspirational learning that promotes and encourages innovative thinking and promotes shared working.
This has started with the CIH Level 3 Certificate in Housing which underpins the principles of housing as a whole. It is enhanced by real-time information developed through the CIH neighbourhood pilot project. Neighbourhood managers and officers are invited to take the ‘temperature’ of estates and document the initiatives that make the neighbourhood a good place to live. The information has also allowed them to consider initiatives that could make neighbourhoods better, sharing best practice from one neighbourhood to another. The new approach does not stop there – supporting teams have also been recruited and trained; and systems have been established to ensure a holistic approach to service provision with the aim of maximising positive outcomes. We have also taken on housing apprentices. They compliment the new team structures and our new ways of working. Apprenticeships also provide a meaningful programme of learning and an excellent opportunity for those aspiring to be housing assistants of the future.

As a result of this pilot, we are already able to see and reap the benefits of the new approach. The learning from the initial training and learning programme is being put into practice and the team work that this project has engendered is making a real difference in the way we manage and deliver our services. There is still much more to do and there are certainly more opportunities for learning from other service providers, but in the meantime our enhanced understanding of those key service providers and agencies at neighbourhood level is allowing us to think and do things differently. We are now proactively engaged with and working alongside those who are as passionate as us in getting this right, driven by making real differences with real outcomes.

Developing creative partnerships to support wider skills development and learning

Examples of the partnerships that we have formed as a result include:

- Working with organisations who share our commitment to the sustainability agenda, such as the NHS. Their ‘Every Contact Counts’ programme is an initiative that sees all front line officers gain an understanding of how they can make a difference to people’s health, directly or indirectly by giving them the right knowledge, tools and skills to ask and assist people in their future health and wellbeing. This partnership working has created further aspirational opportunities for those looking for routes to employment and training.

- Working with Job Centre Plus we offer work experience opportunities to tenants who are long term unemployed. Emphasis is placed upon meaningful apprenticeship programmes, positively targeted to those living in our estates or who have been service users in the past. Working with local training providers these apprenticeships
are in roles that we know offer the potential for longer term employment: for example, multi trade, housing, health and social care. Taking this a step further, our award winning citizenship programme, delivered to primary school children within our neighbourhoods, is now influenced not by reactive messages but inspired by what people really feel makes their area a great place to live. It is delivered in partnership with other key stakeholders passionate about making a difference.

**Measuring the impact**

Measuring the social impact that these new approaches are having is paramount to us. As such we are thinking of new and innovative ways of measuring the long term sustainability of our neighbourhoods. In the first instance this will be via our own internal performance measures which will advise us on the impact we are having on turnover rates, rent arrears, etc. Broader, more localised measures will be established in conjunction with the CIH neighbourhood pilot and our local partners; but there are other examples of innovative measures that we have introduced that will assess the impact we are having on people’s lives in particular areas, measuring the whole approach to neighbourhood sustainability.

One example of this is the introduction of a tracking system. Working with residents, our neighbourhood teams are trained to identify the barriers residents experience in achieving their goals. This is then scored against the tracking system. For example, it may be established that a resident wants to get online but barriers such as lack of affordability of IT or lack of training are preventing them from doing so. This then has adverse effects upon their ability to claim benefits, apply for employment, converse with others, educate themselves (*the list is endless*) – an on-going cycle of exclusion is then created. All of this works against our aspiration to create and support sustainable neighbourhoods. In fact many of these barriers are things that we or our partners can help with. Using this example, our assistance could allow this resident opportunities to access low cost loans to purchase IT equipment and with relevant training and support (by staff) to ensure they can use it effectively. Overall we will ensure positive steps towards helping individuals achieve their goals. These steps and ultimate goals are measured continuously against the tracking system allowing both us and our customers a tangible measurement of achievement.

**A finished product...will there be one?**

Creating sustainable neighbourhoods involves so much more than upskilling staff. At Fabrick, we feel it’s about taking a flexible approach, working collaboratively where we
can; and understanding that we may not get it right first time, all of the time – but we are learning along the journey. Our flexible approach, passion for learning and ability to adapt will assist us make this journey and show once again that we are so much more than bricks and mortar.

**Key points**

- Sustainable neighbourhoods cannot be achieved alone – thinking differently and collaboratively with our stakeholders (including residents) has not only been essential but key in preparing us all for the journey ahead.

- Thinking ‘outside of the box’ with our people and developing structures to establish proactive neighbourhood staff (rather than reactive housing staff) was difficult but key to delivering a more creative approach to neighbourhood management.

- Measuring the social value of what we are doing is essential and one that requires all staff to understand and to engage with.

- The task of delivering sustainable neighbourhoods is on-going – new challenges will come our way and we will have to adapt ourselves and our services accordingly.

- Recruiting staff that are flexible and passionate to take on these challenges will ensure we are in a good position to meet the future.
Technology and networks – transforming the way we learn

By Dave Bramley, Education Officer at CIH

Summary

Networking has been an essential part of professional development for many years, but the advent of social media is providing opportunities to make and maintain connections that weren’t previously possible. Technology is also having an impact on work, which is becoming more complex and change is continuous rather than sporadic. Some now argue that learning and work have converged, with most learning taking place in the flow of work. Organisations will need to respond creatively and effectively to this emerging landscape if they are to learn faster and support staff in new ways of learning.

Understanding social capital in a changing world

Social capital is the sum total of knowledge, skills and experience contained within an organisation. Creating a connected workplace can significantly increase the value of this social capital, as individuals share what they know and learn from each other. Creating a connected workplace requires a platform to facilitate connectivity across space and time. Enterprise Social Networks (ESNs) are similar to social networks such as Facebook, but the community is restricted to those within the organisation and invited guests. As a result, they provide a safe environment, where workers can talk about the things they are engaged in and share what they know.

But simply having a platform isn’t enough – individuals need to change their behaviour and ‘work out loud’ also. This is where the convergence between work and learning takes place. ‘Working out loud’ means providing a brief running commentary on what you are working on and the finished goods you are creating. This will result in a dialogue that reduces the distance between workers and senior management, will encourage transparency and empower workers by giving them a voice to make meaningful contributions and gain recognition.

We have been working with a 20 year old system that records knowledge in documents that are stored in a hierarchy of files and are almost impossible to retrieve. Today’s digital tools provide searchable content and messaging systems allowing us to know what is
happening right now. Organisations that are able to adapt to this new way of working will be current and agile, understanding what their customers want; and will be able to respond to a rapidly changing future.

**How technology is changing the future**

The influence of technology on our lives is growing exponentially. From the way we shop (with a mobile device you have the high street and a credit card in your hand), to the way we watch TV (the TV schedule is becoming superfluous) and the way we keep in touch with family and friends (this is inter-generational).

This influence can be seen across the housing industry. For example, the latest edition of Housing Technology Magazine (March 2013)\(^54\) includes articles on systems that will predict and measure rent arrears, provide case studies on flexible mobile working; and offer systems for collecting and analysing ‘big data’. All these technology driven measures are aimed at improving performance and cutting costs.

Technology is impacting on the nature of work throughout the economy. Process driven jobs are likely to become automated or outsourced; valued work will be non-standardised, complex and creative. We often hear about managing change, but we are entering an era where everyone will need to be able to thrive in a world of constant change.

For housing, the changing political landscape adds an additional layer of complexity, which means delivering on our social business objectives will require a highly skilled workforce. Becoming a learning organisation will be a key component in developing this highly skilled workforce. But the traditional view of learning is also changing and it is important to have an understanding of this, if we are to develop effective learning organisations that are fit for the future.

**Trends in learning**

There are a number of key trends in learning that are having a profound impact on the way in which individuals learn, and organisations develop there staff. We will explore them here:

1. **Connectivism** – Connectivism is a contemporary approach to learning that has been promoted by George Siemens\(^65\) and Stephen Downes.\(^66\) It is often described as the learning theory for the digital age. Central to this is the premise that knowing *how to*
find knowledge is as important, if not more important than actually knowing it. The thesis is that digital media has resulted in knowledge being more distributed than ever and its exponential growth means that individuals must develop personal learning networks, using online and collaborative tools to develop lifelong learning strategies. Siemens’ ‘Principles of Connectivism’ are:

- Learning and knowledge rests in diversity of opinions.
- Learning is a process of connecting specialized nodes or information sources.
- Learning may reside in non-human appliances.
- Capacity to know is more critical than what is currently known.
- Nurturing and maintaining connections is needed to facilitate continual learning.
- Ability to see connections between fields, ideas, and concepts is a core skill.
- Currency (accurate, up-to-date knowledge) is the intent of all connectivist learning activities.
- Decision-making is in itself a learning process. Choosing what to learn and the meaning of incoming information is seen through the lens of a shifting reality. While there may be one right answer now, that same answer may be wrong tomorrow.

Connectivism brings a whole new level of meaning to what we call Networking.

2. 70:20:10 – The 70:20:10 framework is based on research carried out in the 1990s, which found that lessons learned by successful managers came approximately from the following sources:

- 70 per cent from real life and on-the-job experiences, tasks and problem solving, sometimes known as informal learning.
- 20 per cent from feedback and working with or observing role models.
- 10 per cent from courses and reading.

Rather than a prescriptive model, this research demonstrates that we learn most by doing, and that all aspects of learning are important. As work becomes more complex, it also demonstrates that individuals have to take responsibility for their own learning. Most organisational interventions focus on courses, coaching and mentoring. This model suggests that learning and development professionals need to respond by facilitating informal learning, as well as providing traditional products and services.
3. **Push and pull learning** – Traditional courses and qualifications are designed by an ‘expert’ who considers what a ‘typical’ worker might need to know or be able to do. The ‘expert’ then designs a programme to ‘push’ this learning out to learners. In more sophisticated versions, the expert will find out something about the workers they are delivering to, but they will still decide the programme. In many situations this is entirely appropriate, especially when learners are inexperienced.

But technology now provides opportunities for individuals to ‘pull’ knowledge to themselves from sources that they trust. To ‘Google’ has become a verb. There are now other ways to search for knowledge. Online tools such as Twitter, blogs, e-zines, and content curation sites like Scoop.it and Flipboard 2.0 allow individuals to ‘follow’ experts in their field. Experts who share their thoughts and links to resources they have found useful are highly valued and attract numerous ‘followers’. Much of this is in real time and the process of ‘liking’ or +1 or re-tweeting ensures that outstanding resources rise to the top. These are the basics of developing a personal learning network, although they become far more powerful when they are social learning networks.69

**Enterprise Social Networks (ESNs)**

How do we take the principles of Connectivism, 70:20:10 and push and pull learning and apply them as a learning organisation? One step is to develop a connected workplace. However, many organisations are structured in hierarchical silos where communication between departments and even individuals within teams, is often constricted. To achieve this there needs to be a platform to enable connections and communication to take place within a safe environment.

Organisations are using Facebook, Linkedin and increasingly Google+ as a communication platform with customers and stakeholders. But they are generally open networks where information and communication is likely to be guarded. ESNs are similar tools but membership is restricted to invited people only, allowing transparent connections to be made.

Examples of ESNs are: Yammer, Chatter, Jive, Socialcast and Sharepoint. Some of the biggest names on the planet are acquiring ESNs and using them to create a connected workplace. For example, Yammer, a four year old company, was recently purchased by Microsoft for $1.2 billion and is being integrated into its Office suite of products. Whilst organisations such as T-Mobile, Phillips, Pearson and BUPA are using ESNs to boost collaboration amongst their workforce.
It should be noted that most ESNs are ‘freemium’ products – there is a basic level that is free and added functionality and security are available for a fee.

So, why should organisations embrace social learning and invest in an ESN?

As work becomes more complex, with change a constant feature, we are seeing a convergence of work and learning. Often jobs require employees to deal with problems or situations they have never come across before. There isn’t a process to follow and learning has to take place as you go and this is often best achieved through collaboration or co-operation (collaboration is where people are working together in some way; co-operation is when someone provides support without expecting anything in return).

ESNs can be used to fill gaps in knowledge, help with information flow and lead to more effective decision making. They make work transparent and give leaders the confidence to delegate decision making. This helps to streamline work processes and make the organisation more agile and flexible.

They do this by encouraging sharing and personal conversations that help to build strong working relationships. They create a two way dialogue that reduces the distance between leaders and across the organisation.

They capture knowledge, help identify expertise and then transfer the knowledge. For example, imagine a key employee, who has been active on the ESN leaves the organisation. Their replacement could track the profile of the person they have replaced, they will see the connections their predecessor had, the things they were working on and the knowledge they had. It could revolutionise induction!

ESNs empower employees by giving them a voice, providing the opportunity to make meaningful contributions and enable them to get recognition.

I've heard it said that great leadership is about motivation. Empowerment, fulfilling work and recognition are powerful motivators.

Great...lets go out and get the platform, enrol everyone and we will have a collaborative workplace!

It's not quite that simple. The technology is merely a tool that enables collaboration to take place across the organisation in a safe environment. It's not about people joining
the network and ‘following’ colleagues. It’s about them changing their behaviour, using the technology to ‘work out loud’ and share what they know.

I’ve been involved in workplace learning for fifteen years and I can’t remember any programme of learning where those attending haven’t said that they learned more from the other participants than they did from the teacher/tutor/trainer. ESNs provide the opportunity for large scale informal learning across the organisation by removing the barrier of location.

However, for it to be successful individuals need to adapt their way of working, with the two most common objections being ‘I don’t have the time’ and ‘I don’t know what to post’. This is because they see using an ESN as an extra thing to do, or an additional way to communicate.

This is where the convergence of work and learning needs to happen. Rather than an additional task, this is a way of reflecting on the work you are doing and the issues you are facing in an open way, so that others can see it, follow it and contribute to it whilst it is in process – thus making the link with Siemens’ ‘Principles of Connectivism’.

**Working out loud**

A key concept underpinning the reality of a connected workplace is that of explicit and tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is that which can be expressed either by speaking or in writing. Tacit knowledge is that which is contained within the individual and is only released when a new problem or question is encountered. This is often an area that is defined as creative or innovative as people use what they know already to solve new problems, answer new questions or create new products and services. If you tell others what you are doing as you work on it, they may ask you a question or give you a different perspective that leads to a better outcome.

Working out loud is providing a brief running commentary on what you are working on. Andrew McAfee encouraged people to narrate their work in an article entitled ‘Do’s and Don’ts for your works social platform’:

> ‘Talk both about work in progress (the projects you’re in the middle of, how they’re coming on, what your learning, and so on), and finished goods (the projects, reports, presentations etc. you’ve executed). This lets others discover what you know and what your good at. It also makes you easier to find, and so increases the chances you can be a helpful colleague to someone. Finally it builds your personal reputation and ‘brand’.71
A case study:
Enterprise Social Networking (Yammer) at Bromford Housing Group

Here at Bromford we are developing online learning communities as part of our overall learning management approach. Alongside this we have an embedded ESN, Yammer.

We have been using Yammer for two years now and it has been transformational. Our approach has not been to set rules – or do’s and don’ts – we have allowed Yammer to evolve naturally to find out how colleagues want to use it and go on an adventure to see how it can best add value.

Sounds almost romantic but OK, I’ll admit it, this approach was as much by accident than a well planned experiment. As early adopters, I could have written papers and made recommendations, instead we thought it would be more effective to test it out for real. The method? We sent the link to a few savvy and chatty colleagues and watched it spread like knotweed (only it’s been a good thing!).

How has Yammer added value to Bromford? Here is a brief summary of just some of the learning:

- There is increased transparency about what our CEO and senior team are up to and we get to hear what our housing managers and support workers are doing. Whether it’s a posting using the app from the train or a half time comment at an external meeting, it’s good to understand what everyone is doing no matter what their role, to help us achieve our overall strategic plan and live our DNA.

- It has raised awareness of what we are about across the whole of the business and has created a whole load of mini story tellers. The picture posted by our landscaping team of a colleague building a sandbag wall during heavy rain says it all when it comes to connecting support teams with the real world out there. Any colleague can take a view into the lives and work of others. It is hard to measure but elements from our annual engagement survey – which are linked to understanding what the wider business does – have increased dramatically since we have been using Yammer.
• Using groups and hashtags has helped us link themes and deliver a topic focus. At a recent learning event with a guest futurist speaker we were able to share the wisdom from the room using #futurefifty on both Yammer and Twitter. It’s just one of a number of virtual learning methods that can maximise the investment in learning – you don’t have to be there to be there – walls are virtually removed!

• It’s the big virtual water-cooler conversation. Personal announcements are on the money when it comes to ‘likes’ and comments which definitely adds to the feeling of one big family. It’s our own classified announcements with births, deaths and marriages and everything else in between. We don’t insist people join Yammer. It complements our ‘official’ communications and learning channels.

Our guidance to colleagues can be summed up as follows:

• You don’t have to join but if you choose not to you’re missing out on ‘goss’ and so much more. Go on, have a go, add your voice.

• If you wouldn’t say it out loud in the café area don’t yammer it (or tweet or blog it either).

• Respect data protection.

As I write this case study, 91 per cent of our current colleagues have chosen to join Yammer and our top poster with 1,808 messages is Mick Kent our CEO!

Helena Moore, Director of Organisational Development and Communications

A paradigm shift in the way we work

To reiterate, we are currently working with a 20 year old system, in which files become documents, documents are kept in folders and folders are saved in a hierarchy of other folders. As a result the knowledge contained within them is unlikely to be retrieved by anyone other than the person who put it there (and they can’t always find it!).

Today we have an abundance of digital tools that display searchable content and real time messaging systems that tell us what’s happening right now. They are ordered in relation to the time they were produced and designed to tell us what’s new. Organisations that are able to adapt to this new way of working will be current and
agile, they will know what their customers are saying and their colleagues are working on. They will be innovative and adaptable and be in a far better position to deliver the products and services that customers want.

Over the next five to ten years knowledge will be created, remixed and reviewed by most workers; a key skill will be to know how to learn and key behaviours will be collaboration and co-operation.

### Key points

- The influence of technology on our lives is growing exponentially, yet many organisations still approach learning and development with a 20 year old model.
- Knowledge in the modern world and in organisations is transferred in far more complex and porous ways: a successful organisation needs to support approaches and mechanisms which support better knowledge transfer.
- Social networking is a key way in which individuals learn, knowledge is transferred and organisations can grow – organisations need to develop a positive approach to networking and see it as a business advantage.
- In tomorrow’s workplace individuals need to take responsibility for their own learning. In fact their ability to learn will be more important than what they already know. Developing personal learning networks will be the new way to continuously develop as a professional.
Conclusion – becoming a learning organisation

By John Thornhill, Learning Officer at CIH

‘Learning is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel.’
Socrates

This anthology has explored the skills and learning professionals in the housing industry will need to thrive in the future. It has also explored the characteristics of learning organisations because in a context of rapid and unprecedented change, it is only organisations that can maximise collective learning in flexible and adaptive ways that will succeed. So what is a learning organisation?

A learning organisation takes a joined-up approach to different learning elements:

• It actively encourages and supports personal development and the personal commitment of individuals to engage in their own learning.

• It recognises that learning is not just for individuals. To be valuable to the organisation it has to be transferable. Transferrable learning is the sum total of individual learning. Learning organisations recognise the need to develop mechanisms for individual skills and knowledge transfer across the wider organisation.

• It values collective learning and supports structures that facilitate the sharing of skills and knowledge across teams and hierarchies.

• It takes a strategic approach to knowledge management by investing in mechanisms which allow the creation, dissemination, and implementation of knowledge across the organisation.

• It develops shared visions and a shared identity that provides focus and energy for individual and collective learning.

• It is willing to ‘un-learn’. That is, it supports a culture open to inquiry and to leaving behind out-dated values, behaviours and ways of working.

In addition, contributors to this project have emphasised the following features of successful learning organisations:

Developing a culture of learning – Authors have discussed the importance of establishing a strong culture of learning as being a good thing in its own right. The creation of a culture of learning is seen as extending beyond the boundaries of job
functionality to embrace the wider ambitions and aspirations of individuals. It is also seen as extending beyond the workplace to the communities in which organisations operate. This represents a more three-dimensional or holistic approach to learning which is based on the belief that when individuals are supported to develop all of their talents, they are able to contribute to the organisation in more creative and enthusiastic ways. It is also based on a conviction that developing skills and learning are keys to unlocking opportunities and supporting greater self-sufficiency in the communities in which housing providers work.

**Managing talent** – Organisations will need to take a more joined-up approach to identifying, nurturing and rewarding talent in the workforce. Everything that is done to recruit, retain, develop, reward and support performance is part of talent management; and this should be incorporated into strategic workforce planning. A more joined-up approach to talent management can support organisations to ‘grow their own’ leaders in the future.

**Maximising value from learning** – Creating opportunities for transferrable and collective learning have been identified above as characteristics of learning organisations. However, in tougher economic times where training and development budgets are being looked at with greater scrutiny, organisations need to think in a more focused way about how they get the best value for money from learning opportunities. There is a crucial role here for management development. There needs to be much more effective development of managers (especially middle managers) so they can appreciate learning and are not challenged when staff present transformational or creative ideas. This will require a different approach to management – less focused on micro-management or process management and more focused on seeing the bigger picture and achieving business outcomes. In addition, there also needs to be better understanding of whole-person learning supported by quality person-centred one-to-ones and appropriate recognition and reward schemes (explored below).

**Creative approaches to recognition and reward** – Learning organisations recognise the importance of developing fair and equitable strategies for recognition and reward. Adequate recognition and reward should apply to all staff at all levels of the organisation, not just at levels of leadership or visibility. Rewards may be linked to pay and bonuses, but they may also be more intangible. For example, a report for the Work Foundation identified that the actual content of work, the opportunity to fulfil personal goals and flexible approaches to working hours were almost as important as
levels of pay to staff. This anthology contains examples of organisations which have taken imaginative approaches to recognition and reward including helping staff to fulfil their personal dreams and ambitions.

**Creating permeable boundaries** – Learning organisations recognise that creativity and innovation come from all parts of the organisation and that systems and approaches need to be in place so that creative thinking can be captured and shared wherever it arises. This approach emphasises that everyone is involved in shaping organisational identity and driving business improvement. To be effective, this approach requires less rigid hierarchies and better internal networks to support access to information, communication and ideas sharing. It also involves imaginative approaches to challenge and inspire staff and to nurture and capture creative ideas.

**Supporting practice networks and communities of practice** – Learning organisations will need to celebrate and support the development of different networks and communities of practice. These communities can evolve naturally because of members’ common interest in a particular domain or area of practice; or they can be created specifically with the goal of gaining knowledge related to a particular field. They can be virtual or face-to-face. They can be also be supported by peer-to-peer action learning sets. In the future, organisations will need to recognise, and make time for, networking because this will be a crucial conduit for knowledge transfer and relationship building.

**Horizon-scanning** – While the versatility, adaptability and resilience of the housing industry has been recognised by many commentators in the course of this project, it has also been suggested that the housing industry has historically been inconsistent in its ability to ‘horizon-scan’ and plan for the future. This means not enough time has been spent at a strategic level thinking about the future and how organisations need to proactively support skills development to respond to the future. This will require better linkages between supporting individual learning with the longer term strategic and business objectives of the organisation.

**The role of the professional body** – CIH has a pivotal role to play in exploring, describing and supporting learning and skills for the housing industry of the future. It offers an arena where members can share knowledge, innovate, collectively learn and develop cutting-edge practice. CIH also provides a forum in which the housing industry can collectively grow its capacity, competence and voice.
This anthology has sought to explore how housing organisations can navigate the
dramatic and continuous changes affecting the industry; and how they can best prepare
for the future by taking a strategic approach to learning and skills development.

This anthology is far from the last word in our conversation about skills and learning for
the future. At CIH we want you to join us in this conversation. The writer Isaac Asimov
once wrote ‘It is change, continuing change, inevitable change that is the dominant
factor in society today. No sensible decision can be made any longer without taking into
account not only the world as it is, but the world as it will be’.73 The housing industry
is collectively learning to embrace the inevitability of change; and key to surviving and
thriving in this new world will be a strategic commitment to skills and learning aligned
to business and social value. This will involve new ways of working and it will require
corporate commitment to and investment in new ways of learning. But as former US
President Bill Clinton once observed ‘the price of doing the same old thing is far higher
than the price of change’.
Endnotes

1 CIH (2012) *How to…build skills and capacity in repairs services*. Available from: http://www.cih.co.uk/publication-free/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/publication-free/data/How_to._build_skills_and_capacity_in_repairs_services [accessed 13 April 2013]


6 http://homeless.org.uk/leading_places_of_change [accessed 13 April 2013]


8 Richardson, J. (Ed) (2010) *Housing and the Customer: understanding needs and delivering services*, Coventry: Chartered Institute of Housing


14 Asset Skills / Skills for Care event 15 November 2012. Feedback from tabletop discussions


ENDNOTES


34 Details can be supplied by the author (Imogen Parry) on request.

35 Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) – forum for multiple agencies to get together to provide a co-ordinated response for those at the highest risk of domestic abuse.

36 Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) – arrangements for responsible authorities tasked with the management of registered sex offenders, violent and other types of sexual offenders, and offenders who pose a serious risk of harm to the public.

37 Social Care Institute of Excellence (SCIE): http://search02.scie.org.uk/?q=safeguarding [accessed 10 June 2013]

38 World Elder Abuse Awareness Day: http://www.elderabuse.org.uk/Mainpages/Support/support_wead.html [accessed 10 June 2013]


42 Acknowledgement to John Thornhill for his insights from his unpublished document: CIH and EMHG Skills & Learning Roundtable (April 2013)


44 The Digital Literacy project follows a train-the-trainer and qualify-the-users approach to enable staff to support new users develop their own IT skills and knowledge www.digital-literacy2020.eu

45 The Leitch Review of Skills was an independent review by Lord Sandy Leitch Chairman of the national Employment Panel commissioned in 2004, ‘to identify the UK’s optimal skills mix for 2020 to maximise growth, productivity and social justice’ The report published in 2006 recommended that the UK should raise achievements at all levels of skills and recommended that it commit to becoming a world leader in skills by 2020. Available from: http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/leitch_finalreport051206.pdf [accessed 10 June 2013]
46 The Airport Group is a partnership of 14 housing organisations who work collaboratively to tackle the issues that matter the most to them and the people living in their homes. Spanning the North of England, together the group manages over 175,000 homes and employ over 5,000 people. www.theairportgroup.co.uk/

47 The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) is a publicly funded, industry led organisation providing strategic leadership on skills and employment issues in the four home nations of the UK. Its aim is to secure a greater commitment to invest in the skills of people to drive enterprise, jobs and growth. www.ukces.org.uk

48 www.newcharteracademy.org.uk [accessed 10 June 2013]

49 The independent Elton Review on Regulatory and Compliance Requirements for Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), was commissioned by the Housing Corporation in 2006. It was chaired by Sir Les Elton and included far-reaching recommendations to improve tenant involvement in RSLs.

50 The IFORE project is an international partnership between AmicusHorizon and French Housing Association, Pas-de-Calais Habitat and the Universities of Brighton and Artois. It will target 100 homes in Rushenden and 100 homes in the town of Outreau, France. By incorporating the latest energy saving technologies the project is helping residents save on fuel bills, stay warm and reduce their homes’ carbon footprint. 20 per cent of carbon emission reductions will be achieved through training and educating residents to incorporate energy saving behaviour into their daily lives. www.amicushorizon.org.uk/IFORE [accessed 10 June 2013]


58 www.chester.ac.uk/undergraduate/housing-practice-learning-pathways [accessed 10 June 2013]


60 In Abraham Maslow’s theory of the hierarchy of needs, self-actualisation is the final level of psychological development that can be achieved when all basic and mental needs are essentially fulfilled.


62 The Stonewall Workplace Equality Index is Britain’s leading tool for employers to measure their efforts to tackle discrimination and create inclusive workplaces for lesbian, gay and bisexual employees.

63 www.cskills.org/nsacadeemy [accessed 10 June 2013]

64 http://www.housing-technology.com/magazine.php [accessed 10 June 2013]

65 http://www.itdl.org/Journal/Jan_05/article01.htm [accessed 10 June 2013]


67 For a fuller explanation on connectivism go to: http://education-2020.wikispaces.com/Connectivism [accessed 10 June 2013]

68 For more information on how to implement 70:20:10 go to: http://www.internettime.com/2013/02/50-suggestions-for-implementing-70-20-10/ [accessed 10 June 2013]

69 For more information on the tools and how they can be used go to: http://c4lpt.co.uk/top100tools/ [accessed 10 June 2013]
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70 For more information go to: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzRiFch7eM8 [accessed 10 June 2013]

