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# **Memoirs of a trainer: The search for a balance between quality and best practice**

**Abbe Winter and Jenny Mayes, Creative Industries Faculty, QUT**

## **ABSTRACT**

The field of research training (for students and supervisors) is becoming more heavily regulated by the Federal Government. At the same time, quality improvement imperatives are requiring staff across the University to have better access to information and knowledge about a wider range of activities each year. Within the Creative Industries Faculty at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), the training provided to academic and research staff is organised differently and individually. This session will involve discussion of the dichotomies found in this differentiated approach to staff training, and begin a search for best practice through interaction and input from the audience.

## **KEYWORDS:**

Training, research, quality, staff, change.

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In 2005 QUT introduced a Supervisor Accreditation Scheme for all staff who supervise Higher Degree Research (HDR) candidates. The scheme grew out of ongoing Federal-level scrutiny of research training quality, and an identification of overseas trends, as accreditation or at least training of supervisors is part of research training in many countries (e.g. France and Norway). This paper discusses the introduction of the scheme in the Creative Industries Faculty and how it compares with other training provided to academic staff. The Faculty was asked to develop an accreditation scheme for staff using central guidelines that encouraged identification of quality in supervisor practice against four key indicators; supervisory experience, supervision training, research activity, and discipline expertise/qualifications. The Faculty scheme also aimed to: set in place a quality assurance mechanism to ensure quality supervision; to increase the capacity and pool of appropriately accredited supervisors for HDR students; to assist prospective students identify appropriate supervisors; to enable staff to demonstrate capacity as a postgraduate supervisor. Initial guidelines were approved by the Faculty Research and Commercialisation Committee, opened to staff comment and revised by this committee as a result of these comments. The revised guidelines were approved by the Dean's Advisory Committee in late 2004 for implementation in 2005. In 2006, after the first full delivery of research and general academic training, it is an opportune time to reflect on some issues of quality that are arising, particularly in the areas of learning, evaluation, and change.

## **2.0 THE GROUND BENEATH OUR FEET**

In a 2005 survey of British Human Resource professionals, change management was rated as one of the top five issues for trainers for the coming three years (Onrec.com, 2005), illuminating the intersection of the threads of change management and training.

### **2.1 Adult Learning**

Adults usually choose (or volunteer) to continue their education, rather than being required to do so. Adults tend to choose to learn for one of two motivating reasons (or purposes):

1. Extrinsic motivation – because the learning will bring them some reward, such as a promotion or pay rise, or they are required by someone else to undertake the learning, or

2. Intrinsic motivation – because the learning will be the reward, through personal development. Students who seek this route are often referred to as Life Long Learners, although that title is also given more generally to adult learners, including those improving their work-relevant skills (Delahaye).

Learning in adults tends to occur from the absorption of experiences (Swap, Leonard, Shields, & Abrams, 2001) and activities (Schroeder, 1993). However, the experiences being learned from do not necessarily have to be those of the specific learner – we learn from the mistakes and achievements of others as well as we do from those we make ourselves (Delahaye, 2000, 2005; Tracey, 2005).

How experiences are assimilated, remembered and recalled by learners will depend on how the material is presented, which depends in some ways on the preferred learning style(s) of the learners (Brundage, Keane, & Mackneson, 1994; Burke, 1998; Cotton, 2004; Denig, 2004; Dunn, 1998; Dunn & Dunn, 1993; Dunn, Griggs, Olson, Beasley, & Gorman, 1995; Dunn, Ingham, & Deckinger, 1995; Honey, 2003; Honey & Mumford, 1992; Kolb, 1984; Lankard Brown, 2003; Lenehan, Dunn, Ingham, Signer, & Murray, 1994; Meggitt, 1989; Nelson et al., 1993; Schroeder, 1993) While all types exist in balance across the spectrum of human beings, that balance is not a perfect equilibrium with each type equally represented. Schroeder (1993), identified 60% of a study group of higher education students as Sensing – learners who prefer reasons for activities and concrete learning tasks, and 40% as Intuitive – learners who prefer to focus on ‘big pictures’ and creative possibilities. It is therefore important that training developed for the workplace takes account of the various learning styles that can exist, and a good trainer should do this (AIM, 2002; ANTA, 1999).

Improvement of skills used at work, including those needed to keep pace with advances in technology, is often a motivating factor for employers to encourage staff to attend training (Heaton & Lawson, 1996; Lee, Dolezalek, & Johnson, 2005; Livingstone, 2003). Regulatory requirements, particularly in areas such as workplace health and safety, also create a need for training at work, although this is not always welcomed by workers (McWilliam, 2002).

‘Just In Time Learning’ or JITL, is a training method where trainees access the information available as they need it. While Just In Time Learning can be more expensive initially, requiring a trainer to be available at all times, the advantage gained by having participants obtaining information when they are ready to use it can more than offset that ongoing cost. In addition, the term “Just in Time” is becoming more common in business and educational usage, although it is more commonly used to refer to the allocation of money and meeting time rather than training.

The advantages of a Just-in-time approach to workplace learning – immediacy, contextualisation and learner motivation (Delahaye, 2000, 2005) – may be found to outweigh its higher financial cost of having a trainer ‘on call’ all of the time (Rae, 1997). The balance of advantage to disadvantage is generally measured through the program evaluation, which may look at whether the training meets the needs of the learners, employers, and organisations or, in some cases, the state or nation.

## **2.2 Evaluation**

A key determinant in whether any training is successful is provided by its evaluation. Evaluation of the learner generally occurs through assessment, where there are two separate models in use. The first is in terms of the learning experience for the student, and diverges to being either formative (relating to the formation of the student’s knowledge/skills/abilities, generally during the training/class) or summative (relating to the summary or final presentation of the knowledge/skills/abilities at the end of the class/training). The other learner evaluation model relates to how the student is assessed – these models are either normative (where the individual learner is compared with the rest of the class using a model such as a standard distribution, and ranked accordingly) or competency/criterion-based models (where the student is compared to an independent set of standards and generally have their ability to undertake set tasks described as either competent or not yet competent. Where the learner is not yet competent, the evaluation identifies specific areas of knowledge, skills or abilities that need to improve for the learner to be graded as competent (AIM, 2002; ANTA, 1999; Stacey & Wilson, 2003).

Within the field of training and organisational development, the major evaluation technique that has been used historically is the measurement of Return on Investment (ROI), a financial balancing of program cost and resultant efficiency in work practices. More recent authors in the field are beginning to suggest additional evaluation methods, including Return on Value, which measures the overall business achievement – effectiveness rather than merely efficiency (Rae, 1997), and Return on Expectation, which measures the more personal elements of training outcomes, for both the participants and their managers (Hodges, 2004).

In conclusion, evaluation occurs to both learners and training programs. It can occur at any point in a learning experience or training program, with authors and best practice divided on whether it is best to evaluate before, during or after (and how long after). Evaluation can be formative (throughout the program/learning experience) or summative (at the end of the program/learning experience), norm-referenced (though comparison to other programs/learners) or criterion-referenced (through comparison to independent standards).

An evaluation of training may not answer the question of effectiveness, though, as it is possible to conduct an excellent evaluation that asks the wrong questions of the wrong people. In terms of ongoing change management in organisations, training is generally accepted as the ‘way’ to engage workers and bring them along with the change (Byrnes, 2004; Masie, 2005; Stewart, 1996). This assumes that training is able to change attitudes, which is not at all an easy goal to attain or measure. So there may be other ways to investigate and encourage attitude change that are outside of the direct application of training.

### **2.3 Change Management, Resistance, Fatigue and Resilience**

The history of change probably began the moment that the first proto-human looked around and wondered if ‘there’ would be a better place than ‘here’. Since the writings of Lewin in the 1950s there has been a slowly growing field of research and writing on various aspects of organisational change. In more recent years, a significant proportion of this literature is due to the increased rate of change brought about by technological advancements and the globalisation of many processes, including education. Views on change range from the terrified to the welcoming.

One way that the benefits of change are expressed is through corporate stories. In the early 1990s, change authors began recommending the development of a metaphor for changes (Bridges, 1991, 2003). Many writers on change use the metaphor of a sea voyage, describing the change manager as the captain of a ship (Cook, Macaulay, & Coldicott, 2004; Thelander, 2005). This use of metaphors makes it easier to create corporate narratives, and provides both fodder and a framework for organisational stories to be developed, which in turn can make the change process more transparent and ‘real’ to those involved. The disadvantage of most corporate stories is that they are about the leader rather than the followers.

The warp thread of this tapestry – organisational change – is the ongoing constant in organisations, and it actually consists of several strands of thinner thread, twisted together to make the more robust warp thread. In spinning those strands together, the area of organisational change management has been a dynamic one, underpinned by one central theory of effective change management since the 1950s. This theory, developed by social scientist Kurt Lewin, promulgated the conception of change as a three-phased process:

*Unfreezing – changing – refreezing* (Lewin, 1952).

Although Lewin’s Three-Phased Change Model has guided change managers for the last 60 years, practitioners and theorists are now questioning whether it meets the needs of change in the new millennium. Lewin’s model basically presents the change process as a sort of Mayan ziggurat – a long flat step (or phase) of preparation (unfreezing) followed by an incline (changing), then another long flat step (refreezing), repeated every time there is a change. The concern expressed in the literature is

that modern change is so rapid that there is simply no time to ‘refreeze’ the organisation before the next change comes – the model looks more like a distant Egyptian pyramid for most organisations (Griffith, 2002; Scott-Morgan, Hoving, Smit, & Van der Slot, 2001; Weick & Quinn, 1999).

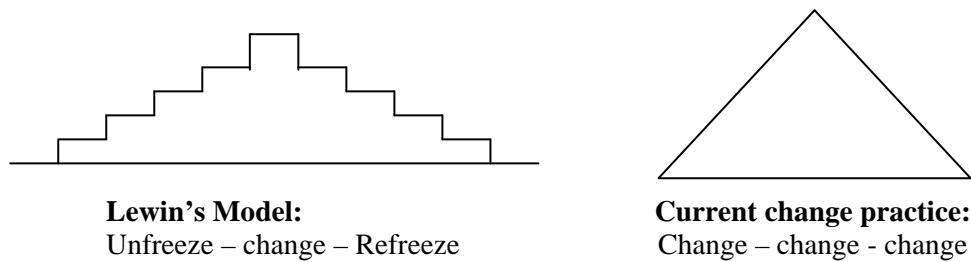


Figure 2.0: Ziggurats and Pyramids of change

So, if Lewin’s model is out-dated, what are the alternatives?

One option is to look for alternative process-driven change management methodologies or quality process change maps, such as Total Quality Management (TQM) or Business Process Reengineering and Six Sigma. The advantage of these methods is that they are thoroughly documented, providing step-by-step processes to be followed (Harmon, 2003; Rye, 2001). However, they do not provide a specific process for managing changes – it is simply assumed that the change will be managed well. So, if process-based change models such as Lewin’s, and more recent quality improvement processes are not relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, this could be because they are applied to change as a process with a set of activities (discrete or overlapping), rather than modelling change as it affects people.

The major author who is progressing the ‘people’ side of organisational change management is William Bridges, with his model of Transition (Bridges, 1991, 2003), which clearly builds on 1970’s philosopher and futurist Alvin Toffler’s concern with the human side of change (to be discussed further below, in the discussion of change fatigue).

Bridges’ model remains three-phased like Lewin’s:

*Neutral Zone – Wilderness – Launching* (Bridges, 1991, 2003).

Unlike Lewin’s 1952 model, Bridges’ model describes how to help people traverse the changing environment, rather than focussing on how to change the environment itself.

While some change managers are adopting Bridges’ model, most, particularly in technology-related change management, appear to remain with Lewin’s (or variations of it), possibly because they are more comfortable in implementing a process than having to deal with and respond to the needs of many people. There is also a growing cohort of change managers who are using another of Lewin’s change models – force field analysis, where the forces ‘for’ a change must outweigh the forces arrayed ‘against’ the change for any change to occur (Lewin, 1952). Although this model allows for the human factor as a force for or against the change, it is still a largely process-based model with little actual consideration of the people to be involved.

Other major strands within the warp thread of organisational change are the concepts of resistance, fatigue and resilience (Hoag, Ritschard, & Cooper, 2002; Hultman, 1998; Mabin, Forgeson, & Green, 2001; Paterson & Hartel, 2000). **Resistance** can be likened to the force that is felt in climbing the pyramid of change – it is actions (and inactions) that try to prevent the change from happening. **Fatigue** can be likened to the physical feeling of exhaustion that is felt in climbing the pyramid of change – another force preventing the change from happening. **Resilience**, on the other hand, is the supporting force (physical, emotional or mental) that gets the climber to the top of the pyramid, and that gets the change to occur.

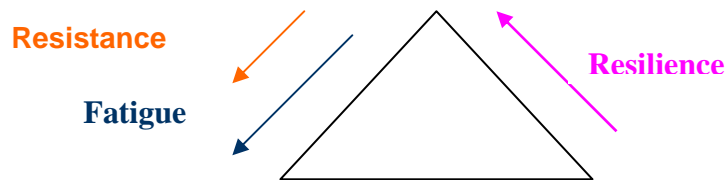


Figure 2.1: Strands of the warp thread in the pyramid of change

The first of the two strands ‘against’, or creating tension in the change, is that of change resistance. Broadly, change resistance is any deliberate choice, usually signalled through action or a lack of action, which is intended to counter the forces for a given change. These choices can range from public activity such as speaking out against the change to passive resistance – the unmoving object who hopes that eventually the change will just ‘go away’. In those cases, the options for change managers that appear in the literature are three-fold:

1. to allow the resister to remain (and hope that eventually they are ‘swept along’ by the overwhelming tide of change);
2. to find a way to bring the resister ‘on board’ with the change; or
3. to remove the resister either actively (through retrenchment or redeployment) or passively (by allowing them to be ‘smashed’ by the tide of change, an approach that often results in stress and other psychological damage to all involved) (Breen & Dahle, 1999; Coutu, 2004; Hoag et al., 2002; Hultman, 1998; Mabin et al., 2001; Moore & Rader, 1991; Paterson & Hartel, 2000).

The related strand causing tension ‘against’ organisational change is that of change fatigue. Broadly, **change fatigue** can be defined as *the feeling by those involved that the organisational changes are never-ending, that they make no appreciable differences or improvements to the organisation, and that it is therefore not worth participating* (Buchanan, Claydon, & Doyle, 1999; RWA Consultants, ; Scott-Morgan et al., 2001; Tapsell & Law, 1998).

Change fatigue can be traced back to Alvin Toffler’s influential 1970 book, *Future Shock*. In it, Toffler describes how to help people cope with what he terms ‘Future Shock’, the ‘shattering stress and disorientation that we induce in individuals by subjecting them to too much change in too short a time’ (Toffler, 1970, p.12).

Currently, there is little literature discussing change fatigue in detail, although some works refer to the construct (Burbank, 2000; RWA Consultants, ; Schlossberg, 1989, 1994). Change fatigue as a specific focus within the area of organisational change management has only begun to attract attention relatively recently, so it is likely that little research has been undertaken on the causes or solutions for it. However, in the writing claiming that change fatigue is a major issue in change management, the following are the factors suggested to identify change fatigue, where they did not exist before the change was implemented:

- Increased stress levels among staff;
- Decreased motivation;
- Passivity / lack of enthusiasm;
- Resistance to the changes, either actively or passively;
- Cynicism to new suggestions; and
- Instability of teams, work groups, and relationships.

(Breen & Dahle, 1999; Hoag et al., 2002; Hultman, 1998; Maurer, 1996, 2003, 2004, 2005; Moore & Rader, 1991; Paterson & Hartel, 2000; Warren, 1999)

Although this exploration of possible causes for change fatigue is not exhaustive, it provides two significant areas for consideration: planning and leadership. All causes are related to the people affected, but are a direct result of the change management process.

The first set of possible change fatigue causes are related to the planning, or design of the change. A primary cause from this set is in not allowing enough time for the transitions, the psychological process people go through to come to terms with the new situation (Bridges, 1991). Related to this are the problems of the entire change happening too quickly; having too many changes occurring at once; and having diverse or asynchronous changes occurring at the same time (Bunker, 2005b, 2005c; Dar-El, 2000; Hodgson & White, 2004; Huy, 2001; Moxley & Pulley, 2004; Poole, Van de Ven, Dooley, & Holmes, 2000; Pulley, 2004; Pulley & Wakefield, 2004; Theobald, 1987).

The second set of change fatigue causes can be directly related to the leader and his/her communication of the change. A primary cause from this group is in having limited direction, or leadership of the change. This can lead to pressure on performance, rather than delivery of improvements. It can also lead to too much change without consultation, and not enough involvement of affected staff. Conversely, it can also lead to too much involvement of staff, where their time, energy, and enthusiasm are given to aspects of the change that do not add value, rather than to progressing the core change issues (Boyatzis, Cowen, & Kolb, 1995; Bunker, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d; Hodgson & White, 2004; Moxley & Pulley, 2004; Pulley, 2004; Pulley & Wakefield, 2004).

In the past five years, a third strand supporting the thread of change – change resilience – has emerged in the organisational change management literature as a possible solution to the problem of change fatigue (Conner, 1993; Diaz & Rodriguez, 2000; Hagevik, 1998). However, while there is little practical discussion about change fatigue, there is even less about this possible solution, change resilience.

Resilience is defined as being ‘able to quickly return to a previous (good) condition’ (Cambridge Dictionary, 2002). Although many authors discuss ways to manage change processes, few refer specifically to the construct of change resilience, presumably because it is still a relatively novel concept in the field of change. However, some do discuss paying attention to the emotions of people involved in change, which is a part of the definition of resilience being used here (Atkinson, 2003; Bartsch, 2000; Bender, 1997; Blake, Mouton, & McCause, 1989). Many of these studies build on seminal work on the importance of empathy in managing effective change (Kirkpatrick, 1987).

Hagevik (1998), writing to provide practical career advice to health care professionals, takes an approach influenced by Bridges’ Transition Model, and suggests that resilience consists of six key personal elements – the ability to be: multifaceted, positive, focussed, flexible, organised, and proactive (Hagevik, 1998). She recommends increasing resilience by defining success for yourself and the job you are doing; seeking feedback (360° if possible); seeing change as a process; and planning for the change. While the article is useful from a practical point of view, it has been written as personal opinion only, and has no cited research to back up its ‘common sense’ claims.

Following Hagevik’s logic, change resilience is clearly strongly related to Bridges’ Transition Model of change management (Bridges, 1991, 2003) as a further way to assist people to traverse the changes.

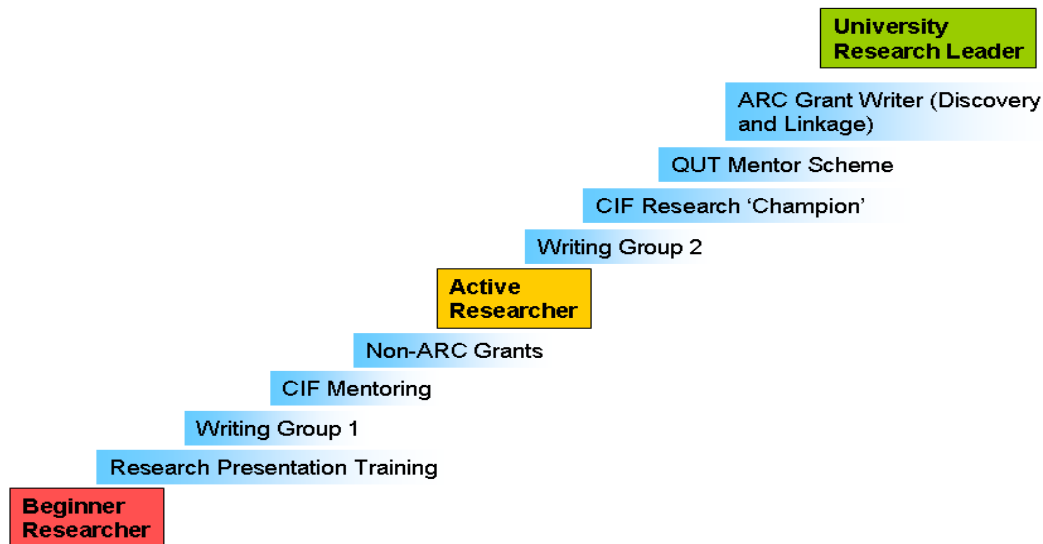
Support for change resilience should therefore assist people in coping with and recovering from the organisational changes that are imposed upon them, either with or without their full cooperation. However, specific support activities for change resilience have not been explicitly detailed in current organisational change management literature. There is therefore a significant opening in the field of literature on change management that discusses issues of change fatigue and specifically the potential solution offered by change resilience.

### **3.0 FINDING A MORE SECURE FOOTING**

Within the Creative Industries Faculty at QUT, there are two separate sets of training that are developed in-house to meet the needs of staff, in the areas of research and administration.

The research training can be depicted as a stairway, scaffolding and structuring activities and learnings to reach increased outputs as measured by the Federal Government's Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST).

### CIF Research Stairway



The other structured in-house training that is provided to academic staff is designed to be a set of themed stepping stones to meet the immediate administrative needs of either the Faculty or the University. These sessions, aimed to be run twice per year just before the start of each major teaching semester, are designed to deliver the immediate information that is needed by staff in order to manage their daily teaching work, while, at the same time, providing some development in areas of interest.

The Faculty noticed a significantly lower resistance to the introduction of these training and accreditation mechanisms than many other faculties at QUT did, possibly because the Faculty is newer (having been established in 2001) or because there are proportionately more beginning academics/researchers than in more established faculties. An initial analysis of the second round of data collection for supervisor accreditation reveals that there has been a lower response rate, possibly indicating increased resistance the second time around.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

Methods of assuring the quality of training provided both to researchers and academic staff generally is just in its infancy, and needs to grow with the formal delivery of these training and assessment schemes. The session that accompanies this paper will explore those issues of quality in an interactive way, enacting the responses of academic staff towards the training that has been provided, in hopes of beginning to develop a cohesive, encompassing plan for assuring quality in the training that we provide to our academic staff.



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## **Addendum to *Memoirs of a Trainer*: What the group identified as features of quality in training**

- Right timing.
- Time to apply what was learned.
- At least some hands-on component.
- Concise.
- Relevant (think about just-in-time learning).
- Fun!
- Education upwards (to management) about the benefits and value of the training.
- Offer something new – training needs to be reinvigorated regularly so that people who come are learning something new.
- Training based on a needs analysis.
- Happens in an environment that is conducive to learning (think about different learning styles).
- Ask people what they need – build the relationship before they reach the training session.
- Opportunities for networking and learning from each other.
- Relevance to the actual job.
- Start with an understanding of who is where (in terms of level, ability, interest *etc*).