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Citation: Elliott, Ian (2020) Organisational Learning and Change in a Public Sector Context. Teaching Public Administration. ISSN 0144-7394 (In Press)

Published by: SAGE

URL:

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### **Organisational Learning and Change in a Public Sector Context.**

Journal:	<i>Teaching Public Administration</i>
Manuscript ID	TPA-19-0033
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Keywords:	organisational learning, change, public services, austerity, organisational development
Abstract:	<p>It is broadly accepted that learning is important in supporting the delivery of change (Tsang, 1997). Furthermore, during times of public sector budget cuts there is a growing interest in innovation and change (Pollitt, 2010, Brown and Osborne, 2013). However, it is also generally accepted that austere times typically lead to a reduction in training and development budgets – particularly within the public sector (Jewson et al., 2015).</p> <p>This paper explores the extent to which the assumed link between learning and change is contested during austerity. 51 public sector managers from Wales and Scotland participated in the study, over a period of 13 months, from a wide range of public sector organisations across two devolved parts of the UK. The research explored issues surrounding motivations for learning, expectations of outcomes and perceptions around the drivers of change.</p> <p>It is found that public sector budget cuts are having a direct impact on learning and development opportunities across the UK public sector. Whilst budget cuts may lead to change, this is likely to be piecemeal rather than strategic. In conclusion this research supports the view that austerity is a barrier to meaningful change in the public sector and not a driver.</p>

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## Organisational Learning and Change in a Public Sector Context.

### ABSTRACT:

*It is broadly accepted that learning is important in supporting the delivery of change (Tsang, 1997). Furthermore, during times of public sector budget cuts there is a growing interest in innovation and change (Pollitt, 2010, Brown and Osborne, 2013). However, it is also generally accepted that austere times typically lead to a reduction in training and development budgets – particularly within the public sector (Jewson et al., 2015).*

*This paper explores the extent to which the assumed link between learning and change is contested during austerity. 51 public sector managers from Wales and Scotland participated in the study, over a period of 13 months, from a wide range of public sector organisations across two devolved parts of the UK. The research explored issues surrounding motivations for learning, expectations of outcomes and perceptions around the drivers of change.*

*It is found that public sector budget cuts are having a direct impact on learning and development opportunities across the UK public sector. Whilst budget cuts may lead to change, this is likely to be piecemeal rather than strategic. In conclusion this research supports the view that austerity is a barrier to meaningful change in the public sector and not a driver.*

### KEY WORDS:

organisational learning, change, public services, austerity

WORD COUNT: 5434

## **Introduction**

It is broadly accepted that there is a strong link between organisational learning and change (Tsang, 1997). At the same time there is a lack of consensus on how they are related and to exactly what extent. Indeed there are even continuing debates on the very definition of organisational learning (Easterby-Smith et al., 1998; Tsang, 1997; Wang and Ahmed, 2003).

Within the public sector, austerity is seen by some as not affecting the likelihood of change (Wright et al., 2013) whilst for others it acts as a significant barrier (Roberts and Bailey, 2013).

This research begins with a consideration of the distinction between organizational learning and the learning organisation and how they each relate to organizational change. It then goes on to explore the relationship between austerity, learning and change in the public sector. The experiences of 51 public sector managers are taken into account in exploring the extent to which public sector cuts associated with austerity are having an impact on the nature and extent of learning within public sector organisations.

It is found that public sector budget cuts are changing the approach to learning and to organisational change. Specifically, organisations are increasingly viewing learning in an instrumental way linked to individual projects or activities rather than in a more reflective or holistic way. Likewise change is increasingly seen to be piecemeal and transactional rather than strategic and transformational. It is anticipated that further austerity will continue to limit the benefits of any learning and development and the likelihood of effective organisational change.

## **Learning organisation and organisational learning**

There are multiple perspectives on the nature of change and multiple frameworks that illustrate these perspectives (By, 2005). Similarly a number of approaches to organisational learning have been proposed such as the learning cycle (Kolb 1984); action research (Lewin, 1946); action learning (Revans 1980); appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987); and the learning organisation (Pedler et al., 1991; Senge, 1990; Argylis and Schon, 1978, 1996). All these approaches recognise, albeit in different ways, the interconnectedness of learning and change as well as the relationship between the individual in making change happen and the organisation in providing a fertile environment for change to take place.

Much of the literature on organisational learning and learning organisation treats the two terms as interchangeable. Yet if we take organisational learning to represent, at least in part, learning and development opportunities that are either supported or coordinated by the organisation it does not necessarily follow that the organisation is a 'learning organisation'. For example, Pedler et al. (1991) argues that a learning organisation should support individual learning in order to transform the entire organisation. Yet surely it does not follow that if an organisation is committed to individual learning it is also *de facto* committed to organisational transformation. As noted by Senge, 'individual learning does not guarantee organizational learning' (2006, p. 129). Likewise an organisation devoted to learning is not necessarily a learning organisation.

Literature on the learning organisation emphasises the degree to which an organisation is skilled at the development and management of knowledge (Garvin, 1993). This also recognises the organisation as a fluid entity which embraces learning as an enabler of change in order to adapt and survive in a fast-paced environment (Senge, 1990). In comparison organisational learning is arguably a broader and more fluid term. As such it is more difficult to define as it encompasses ideas of individual, team-based and organisation-wide learning activities.

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3 Typically organisational learning describes a range of isolated activities that are either organised  
4 or supported by the corporate centre in the form of learning and development opportunities for  
5 staff. As put by Wang and Ahmed (2003) organisational learning is 'the collectivity of individual  
6 learning within the organisation' (p. 9).  
7

8 For the purposes of this research it is purported that organisational learning is learning which  
9 takes place within an organisational context (typically an employer) whereas a learning  
10 organisation requires a deeper and much more substantive organisational commitment to  
11 learning as an enabler of change. Therefore the contrast is between learning within  
12 organisations and organisations that learn. As Tsang points out, 'a learning organization is one  
13 which is good at organizational learning' (1997, p. 146).  
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### 16 **[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]**

  
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18 Table 1 provides a typology of what might be expected within a learning organisation as  
19 opposed to an organisation which happens to have some ongoing learning activities within it.  
20 Whilst it is accepted that many of the features are difficult to measure and perhaps, in the case  
21 of the learning organisation, aspirational, they nonetheless provide a useful tool for exploring the  
22 extent to which an organisation is truly committed to learning as an enabler of change. The  
23 following section discussed how ideas associated with organisational learning and the learning  
24 organisation may manifest in the public sector.  
25

### 26 ***Public sector context***

  
27

28 The public sector is an interesting case in this context because public sector organisations are  
29 typically seen to be highly hierarchical and formalised organisations (Werkman, 2009).  
30 Consequently they are characterised as being resistant to change and not conducive  
31 environments for individual agency. At the same time many public sector organisations invest in  
32 learning as a tool to further enhance the scope for change. Therefore it is interesting to consider  
33 the extent to which an investment in organisational learning leads to a direct improvement in the  
34 opportunity for individual actors to influence change.  
35

36  
37 Of particular significance presently is the context of austerity. There are at least two ways in  
38 which austerity may be seen to impact on organisational change: employee's commitment to  
39 change and organisational commitment to learning.  
40

41 In terms of employee's commitment to change it is generally accepted that people are more  
42 likely to embrace change when they see there is something to gain. Consequently it might be  
43 assumed that times of austerity – where change is often linked to cuts – are likely to bolster  
44 barriers to change as employees fear lose – either to the public service and / or to themselves  
45 personally (Levine, 1979). Within the public sector it is also commonly assumed that there is a  
46 link between perceived personal benefit and willingness to support change. However, Wright et  
47 al. (2013) have shown that a high Public Service Motivation (PSM) is likely to increase people's  
48 support of change – even in times of austerity and cuts. Therefore austerity may not directly  
49 affect people's commitment to change.  
50

51 In terms of an organisational commitment to learning it is difficult to draw comparisons between  
52 public and private sectors. For example, statistics from the CIPD would suggest that the median  
53 training budget in the public sector is significantly lower than in the private sector. Where private  
54 sector organisations are reported to spend an average of £372 per employee per year on  
55 training this is only £238 in the public sector (see Figure 1).  
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3 **[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]**  
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5 However, these statistics only present a partial view of sectoral comparisons. Others suggest  
6 that the public sector spends significantly more on training and development than the private  
7 sector (Jewson et al., 2015). Yet this only serves to highlight the extent to which public-private  
8 comparisons represent a false binary. There is in fact little value in drawing on such  
9 comparisons for a number of crucial reasons as have been widely discussed elsewhere (Boyne,  
10 2002; Bozeman, 1987).  
11

12 What is perhaps more informative is that 54% of public sector organisations have seen their  
13 training budget cut in 2015 compared with only 24% of private sector organisations as  
14 demonstrated in Figure 2. These figures are collaborated elsewhere (Jewson et al., 2015) yet  
15 there is strikingly little research into the extent of cuts to training budgets and the potential  
16 impact that this may have upon the leadership of change in the public sector.  
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18

19 **[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]**  
20

21 In 2015 the majority of private sector organisations reported an increase in their learning and  
22 development headcount and in their use of external associates compared to a decrease of both  
23 in the public sector (CIPD, 2015). What is more, only 8% of public sector organisations have  
24 seen an increase in their learning and development budget compared to 25% of private sector  
25 organisations. Others have reported that the number of public sector organisations with a  
26 training plan for the year ahead has fallen from 82.7% in 2005 to 74.6% in 2011 (Jewson et al.,  
27 2015). Thus there is some consensus on the view that austerity is having a negative impact on  
28 training budgets.  
29

### 30 ***Method*** 31

32 In order to explore this in more depth the following research explores the extent to which the  
33 assumed link between learning and change is accepted within local government. The research  
34 goes on to explore perceptions on the extent to which austerity and resultant cuts to training  
35 budgets are likely to affect the barriers and enablers of change. The fieldwork comprised of four  
36 stages, all conducted in 13 months between 2015-2016.  
37  
38

39 Firstly the study used total of 7 semi-structured interviews with a convenience sample of former  
40 students in postgraduate public administration programmes. These participants were all middle  
41 to senior level managers from five local authorities, the devolved government and a national  
42 park in Wales. The interviews were used to understand people's motivations for study and the  
43 perceived benefits of study in relation to organisational change. In particular, issues around  
44 barriers and enablers of change were considered in relation to the impact of formal higher  
45 education and what impact austerity may have on readiness for change.  
46

47 Later, three of the original seven participants agreed to take part in a follow-up interview (again  
48 from a range of local government, devolved government and national park). Prior to these  
49 interviews a short summary of key findings from the first round of interviews was circulated.  
50 These second interviews then allowed participants the opportunity to clarify and develop their  
51 thoughts from the first interviews.  
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54 In the third stage of the research a further 5 interviews were conducted with public sector  
55 managers from one local authority in Scotland. Again these interviews were used as a process  
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3 of member checking and data triangulation in order to enhance the trustworthiness of the  
4 research findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).  
5

6 Finally, a series of three focus groups were conducted with separate groups of middle and  
7 senior level managers from four local authorities and one part of the NHS in Scotland. Focus  
8 groups ranged in size from 6-18 participants with a total of 39 participants taking part. With the  
9 focus group a nominal group technique was used to build consensus around the groups on what  
10 were seen to be the key enablers and barriers of change as well as to identify 'key players' and  
11 'minimal effort' groups within a stakeholder analysis (Johnson and Scholes, 1999) for each of  
12 the local authority areas. This was to offer further insight and challenge to the initial findings in  
13 order to further enhance the trustworthiness of the findings (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). This final  
14 stage also helped to develop more analysis of the extent to which learning was seen to impact  
15 on the enablers and barriers to change.  
16  
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18 The research was conducted in line with university research ethics guidelines, procedures and  
19 regulations. All steps were taken to stress to participants that their participation was entirely  
20 voluntary and they were reminded at the start of interviews that they could elect to exit the  
21 research at any stage. To protect the identity of participants they have all been given synonyms  
22 in the below analysis.  
23

### 24 ***Background of participants and engagement in learning and development***

25  
26 Participants were asked both about their motivations for working in the public sector and their  
27 motivations for learning. Many suggested, in line with findings from elsewhere (Wright et al.,  
28 2013) that public service motivation factors were significant in their career choice. But drivers for  
29 engagement in learning and development tended to be driven by more personal motivations.  
30 Indeed there was a lack of organisational drivers, motivators or expectations that people would  
31 take part in continuing professional development. Those who did cite an expectation of learning  
32 and development were typically bound by the requirements of professional bodies. Furthermore,  
33 it was noted by many that completion of training and development would not automatically lead  
34 to any salary increments, career progression or other benefits.  
35  
36

37 A number spoke of the fact that training budgets had been significantly reduced and that training  
38 budgets were likely to continue to reduce and that in any context of budget cuts training budgets  
39 were often the first to go. Indeed it was noted that budget cuts were viewed as 'quick wins' as  
40 the following extract from Fraser illustrates,

41 *I had a meeting only last week when we were looking at how I'm going to make some*  
42 *fairly massive savings next year and one of the seemingly easy wins was to probably*  
43 *half the relatively small budget for training and development.*

44 This corresponds with evidence that suggests 52% of public sector organisations have had  
45 learning and development budgets cut compared to 28% in the private sector (CIPD, 2013).  
46

47 There was also an acknowledged lack of strategic perspective in the way budgetary decisions  
48 were being taken. Fraser went on to say,

49 *I think it's [the 50% cut to the learning and development budget] probably something*  
50 *that's just plucked from the air quite frankly. It isn't a figure that's going to go a long way*  
51 *to meeting the overall savings. It's only, it's a small sum... So it's very easy to think in*  
52 *terms of round numbers when you're looking to reduce it.*  
53

54 Similarly where decisions were taken on how learning and development spending should occur  
55 there were a fairly narrow set of criteria used-particularly in relation to the current needs of the  
56 job rather than any future view of changing organisational needs. Again this points to a lack of  
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any strategic commitment to learning and development as part of a wider cultural of supporting innovation and change.

With their colleagues it was also stated by many participants that learning and development was not a priority as illustrated by Gareth,

*you've got people who their ambition was to come and work for [this public body]. And once they come here they have no intention of leaving and it is fairly challenging then to get them to engage in a learning process after that. Y'know 'cause there is no aspiration to leave.*

### **Benefits of learning and development**

In terms of the benefits that accrued from learning and development again these were framed largely in personal terms. For those who did not have a public sector background there was a sense of completing learning and development in a related subject in order to gain a better sense of how the sector works. Often this was referred to in terms of being able to perform better within their roles. It was also recognised that this could support progression within their organisations. But again this was informed by personal motivations and was not part of an organisational commitment to learning and development.

As Claire stated, *'It is for career progression, I was always very clear that I wanted a career'*. This personal motivation was often in contradistinction to the perspective of employers, as Claire goes on to say, *'It was free, that is the biggest driver, y'know because that is the first thing you get asked about is "how much is this gonna cost us?"'*

Whilst having a greater understanding of the public sector context was, for many, seen as having a personal benefit there was also a recognition that a greater understanding could be used to influence change that would lead to positive outcomes for their employer. In this sense the public sector context and focus of any learning and development was seen as important. Consequently not all learning and development activities were seen as equally valuable. As Beth noted,

*In the MBA public and third sector were never mentioned. At all. I've got my books here, never mentioned, corporate strategy it would just never be, it's all focus on um, spend and profit. Not on collaboration, efficiency, learning from others. So the public sector is a different animal altogether – it naturally includes that.*

This supports the view that context-specific learning and development activities are essential to support effective change. A number of participants pointed specifically to an apparent deficiency in MBA study in failing to capture the complexity and political context of public sector organisations. Despite this perceived value in public sector sensitive learning and development many have lamented the waning of public administration programmes in UK higher education (Boyne, 1996; Chandler, 1991; Chandler, 2002; Jones, 2012; Miller, 2012; Talbot and Talbot, 2014). This may suggest that any decline is not due to a lack of demand – but rather a lack of appropriate funding.

Other benefits of learning and development were seen to accrue from having time away from the workplace to reflect and think about current challenges from a distance. As Beth stated, *We never have incubation time. It's so hectic in [this part of the organisation] and I never get management incubation time, solution-building time, and working through that course, especially leading change, gave me a view, it made me step away from it and do a commentary on it. It was a self-analysis.*

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3 Networking opportunities that came with engagement in learning and development were also  
4 seen as important. This reflects the value of collective learning (Wang and Ahmed, 2003) and  
5 the wider experiential or informal elements of learning within a formal setting.  
6

7 Yet all participants found it difficult to give specific examples of how meaningful change had  
8 been delivered better following their learning and development. This highlights the challenge of  
9 evaluating learning and development programmes – where outcomes can be multi-faceted,  
10 subjective and consequently difficult to measure.  
11

### 12 **Barriers to change**

13  
14 Whilst it proved difficult to identify ways in which change had been enabled by their learning and  
15 development there was a greater sense of awareness of persistent barriers to change. These  
16 included structural issues, social / cultural issues and financial constraints.  
17

18  
19 In terms of structural issues it was felt by some that the ability to influence change was affected  
20 by position within the hierarchy. Consequently it was at times felt that engagement in learning  
21 and development activity would always have a limited effect in relation to other personal factors  
22 such as attitude and emotional intelligence.  
23

24 Indeed there was often a sense of frustration expressed by participants that, whilst they were  
25 committed to organisational change and service improvement, many of their colleagues  
26 remained resistant to change as exemplified by Fraser,

27 *It's been a source of incredible frustration, I've never worked anywhere where I've found*  
28 *people so seemingly absolutely resistant to change...Whenever I've tried to introduce*  
29 *change I've come across incredible passive resistance of discovering that people just*  
30 *simply haven't done what they've been told to do and you discover later they've been*  
31 *carried on doing it in the same old way.*  
32

33 Similarly organisations were often seen as being reluctant to invest in change that could  
34 potentially create longer-term benefits as there was an immediate pressure to realise benefits  
35 from as low an input cost as possible. The complexity of factors involved in resisting change  
36 reflects the findings of Kluipers et al. (2014) who note that there is no consensus on the causes  
37 of change resistance in the public sector. But there are certainly signs of the 'muddled thinking'  
38 described by Betts and Holden (2003) and a degree to which learning takes place in a context  
39 where the cultural and political paradigm of the organisation is not up for discussion or debate.  
40

41 Many participants commented on the context of ongoing spending cuts as having created an  
42 environment where people and organisations were more risk-averse. Reductions in staff  
43 numbers had led to an environment where there were fewer people available to implement and  
44 support change. There was also a greater emphasis on protecting core services rather than  
45 trying to do things differently. At the same time a number of participants commented on the  
46 nature of risk-averse public sector workers as creating barriers to learning and change. It was  
47 noted by Gareth that,

48 *I think barriers come in numerous ways, I think one, it's the type of people and it's going*  
49 *to be very interesting to see if this changes over the coming decades, if you like, that*  
50 *there are, we still have a number of people working in public organisations that joined*  
51 *the organisation on a career-for-life basis and therefore they have certain expectations*  
52 *and an expectation that there is not going to be massive change within that. That in*  
53 *some ways comes out in particular with terms and conditions which actually makes it*  
54 *very difficult to change things. And certainly people tend not to move because of the*  
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3 *pension requirements etc. are fairly generous and therefore why would they be in that*  
4 *position? Plus you have a fairly bureaucratic mind-set.*

5 These findings reflect the views of those in the focus groups who consistently highlighted lack of  
6 capacity or resources as a key barrier to change. Indeed all focus groups found it much easier  
7 to identify barriers than to identify enablers of change. What is more, barriers to change were  
8 seen to becoming more entrenched. This was particularly the case with participants who were  
9 from local authorities who described a lack of leadership capability and scope to try new things.  
10 This is perhaps not surprising when so much as 80% of local authority's budgets are consumed  
11 by statutory services (Elcock, 2013). In other words, there was a sense that the austerity cuts  
12 were leading to an increasing focus on protecting statutory services and anything else was  
13 increasingly being seen as superfluous.  
14

15  
16 So for many participants it was felt that the public sector remained reluctant to embrace change.  
17 Furthermore, and in contrast to the findings of Wright et al. (2013), austerity reforms were likely  
18 to increase resistance. Partly this was seen to be due to increased anxiety over the impact of  
19 change and partly because even those who might typically be supportive of change were now  
20 focused on preserving remaining levels of public services as much as possible. This is in line  
21 with the findings of Roberts and Bailey (2013) who found that austerity was leading to a  
22 reduction in the staff needed to support innovation and staff needed to identify and initiate  
23 innovation. At the same time austerity reform may also limit the extent to which methods to  
24 overcome resistance, such as the use of incentives (Thomas 2006, as cited by Kluijpers et al.,  
25 2014), can be used.  
26

### 27 **Greater need for learning and development**

28  
29 It was felt that learning and development, if undertaken widely across an organisation, could  
30 help overcome some of the social and cultural barriers to change. In part this was seen as a  
31 potential counter to the perceived lack of willingness from some to accept the need for change.  
32 As Gareth suggested,  
33

34 *learning is an opportunity of widening horizons and getting people to have an*  
35 *understanding y'know there are different ways of operating...undoubtedly learning*  
36 *opportunities do provide an opportunity of widening experience and identifying that there*  
37 *are different ways, and better ways, of doing things.*

38 Therefore learning and development could be used to help people both understand the need for  
39 change and cope with the effects of change. Yet financial pressures were such that it was felt  
40 this was unlikely to happen.  
41

42 During the second round of interviewing it was noted that resistance to change was also  
43 different within different elements of the organisation. In particular it was felt that middle and  
44 lower-level managers were more resistant to change and also that Trade Unions would, along  
45 with some elected members, block any changes that would have a detrimental impact on staff.  
46 Within the focus groups elected members were also seen to be a key barrier to meaningful  
47 change. This was linked to a fear of failure which many felt was heightened by the increasing  
48 pressure on resources. Overall the reasons listed for resistance to change were multi-faceted.  
49 Most participants had a positive view of change and their learning had instilled ideas which they  
50 were keen to implement within their workplaces. Yet for many the focus of change initiatives  
51 was more on piecemeal cutback management (Levine, 1979; Schmidt et al. 2017) in line with  
52 'salami slicing' approaches which have been described as "crude, knee-jerk management  
53 approaches" (Bailey, 2016: 50). This chimes with what others have found in relation to the  
54 challenges with implementing innovation and change in the context of austerity (Lowndes and  
55 Pratchett 2012; Lowndes and Squires 2012). It is recognised that such cutbacks may cause a  
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3 negative impact on staff morale and motivation (Esteve et al. 2017). This research suggests  
4 that, for those involved in this research, their experience of having recently undertaken a  
5 relevant education programme heightened the sense of demotivation as they had a sense of  
6 what strategic changes could be made but felt these were being ignored in preference for  
7 'salami-slicing'.  
8

### 9 **Future change**

10  
11 Ongoing austerity meant that, for many, change was seen as inevitable. As Euan explained,  
12 *We've been going through two or three years of what we call efficiency savings. What*  
13 *we would infamously call doing the same things with less. We're now getting to the stage*  
14 *where i think in the next three or four years we've got about £30m savings to find on top*  
15 *of what we've found already and we're starting the process of identifying where the real*  
16 *cuts would be or what we can stop doing altogether as opposed to just y'know pairing off*  
17 *a bit here and there.*  
18

19 Consequently therefore, it was felt that change would occur across the public sector, as further  
20 austerity reforms were imposed. But there was a general sense that public bodies would  
21 continue to have a reactive and piecemeal approach to change. At the same time public sector  
22 organisations were seen to be increasingly risk-averse and defensive in the face of continued  
23 public sector budget cuts.  
24

25  
26 Whilst some were committed to developing a strategic approach to change there were many  
27 more who were pessimistic about readiness for change within their organisations. As Fraser  
28 summed up,

29 *I think to be fair, I am, I am managing to make little changes. Perhaps ah, perhaps what I*  
30 *am learning is that one's got to be content with small victories, little changes, rather than*  
31 *expecting people to take on board and embrace something more major. So maybe I've*  
32 *learned about setting a realistic target rather than hoping for ah, transformation.*

33 Yet, when it came to considering where this change might originate the focus group participants  
34 held that the most significant enabler of change was legislation and political initiative. Linked to  
35 this was the commonly held view that elected members were the 'key player' in local authorities.  
36 In contrast members of the public, and particularly those who were not regular users of services,  
37 were seen to have lowest levels of power and influence in the stakeholder analysis.  
38 Consequently it would seem that significant change will not be stimulated by austerity without an  
39 accompanying degree of political leadership.  
40

### 41 **Conclusions**

42  
43 Much of the above analysis reflects the conclusion put forward by Betts and Holden of  
44 'ambiguity and muddled thinking in relation to the links between strategy and learning in  
45 organisations' (Betts and Holden, 2003, p. 280). Change is certainly happening within the public  
46 sector and is likely to continue. Likewise there are many managers and employees who remain  
47 committed to learning. Yet the links between the development of a learning organisation and  
48 change have yet to be recognised to their full potential.  
49

50  
51 Specifically public sector organisations are seen to have many of the characteristics, outlined in  
52 Table 1, of engaging in organisational learning but exhibit none of the characteristics of a  
53 learning organisation. As such participants from the learning and development programme were  
54 unable to identify any significant organisational benefits from their learning and development. At  
55 the same time they were more conscious of the need for change, of the value of learning and  
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development in enabling change and of the persistent structural barriers that they felt continued to block effective organisational change.

Austerity politics were seen to play a particularly significant role in stymieing organisational change. All participants noted continued cuts to learning and development budgets and staffing levels. Yet political leadership was required in order to enable such change to occur. In this context the opportunity, desire and ability to lead change was seen to be deteriorating. In the face of ongoing austerity it is perhaps unlikely that the benefits of learning and development will be realised in the public sector any time soon.

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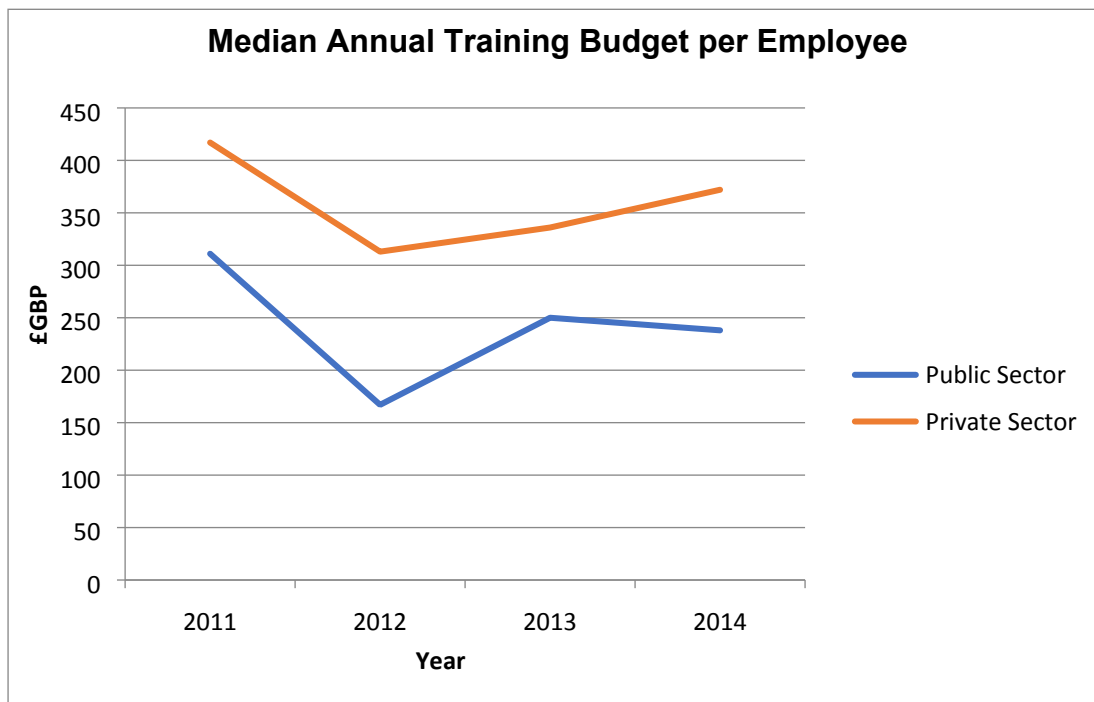
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**Table 1 – A typology of learning and change**

	<b>Learning organisation</b>	<b>Organisational learning</b>
Type of learning	Double- and triple-loop learning	Single-loop learning
Approach to learning	Deep learning	Surface-level / instrumental learning
Locus of learning	Organisational culture	Individual people
Organisation of learning	Strategic	Piecemeal
Commitment to learning	Long-term	Short-term
Timescales	Continuous	Sporadic
Attitude to risk taking	Embraced	Avoided
Type of change	Transformational	Transactional
Evaluation criteria	Impact	Cost-effectiveness
Relationship to change	Integral	Ad hoc

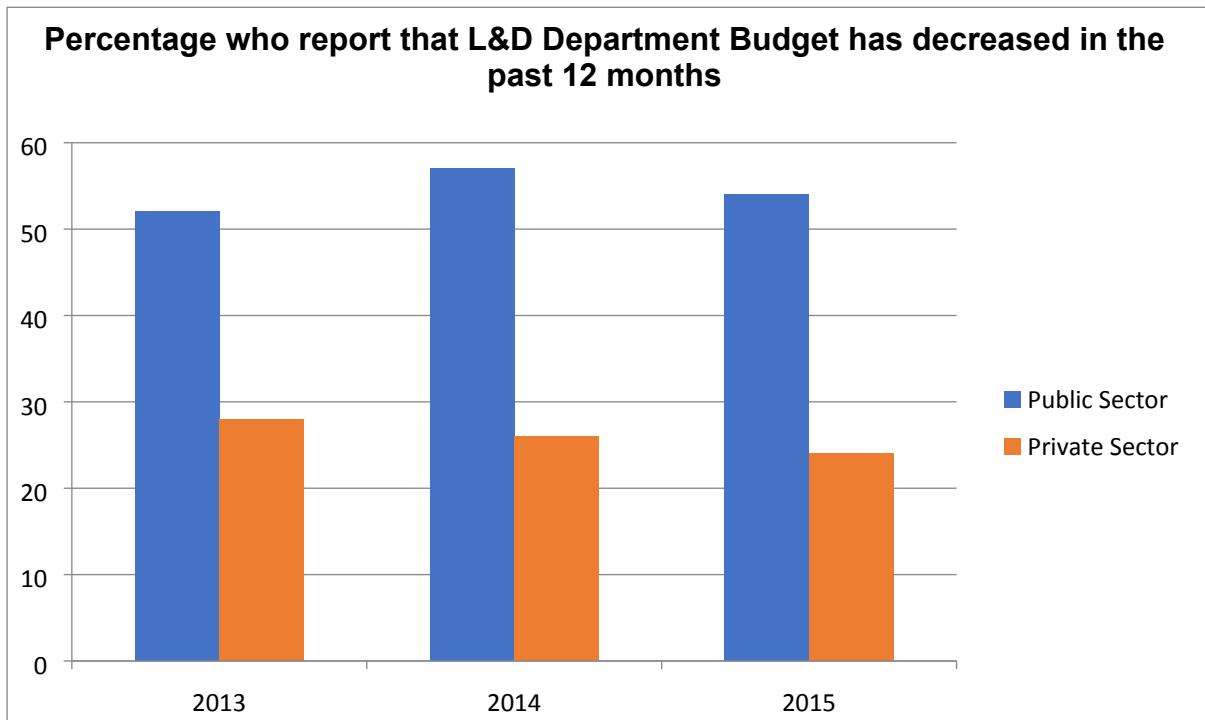
Figure 1 – Average training budget in public and private sector organisations



Source: Adapted from CIPD 2014



Figure 2 – Reported change in Learning and Development Budget



Source: Adapted from CIPD, 2013; CIPD 2014 and CIPD 2015