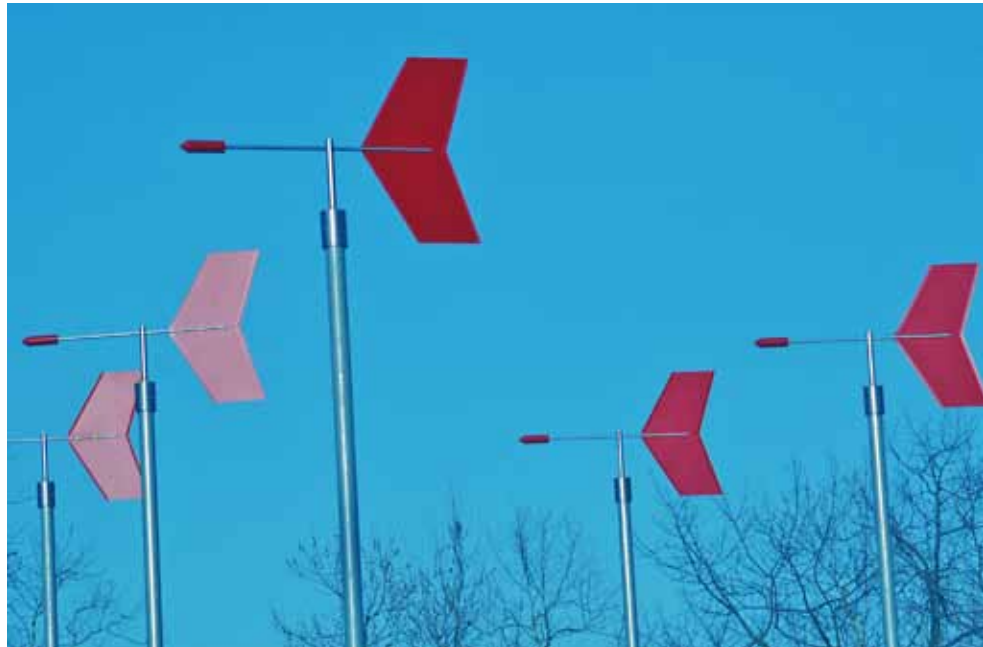


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Change Academy

Creating sustainable change in higher education?

The coming decade will see radical change as universities, colleges and policy-makers worldwide adjust and respond to the demands of an increasingly complex global higher education environment. The debate about the nature of universities (Barnett, 1999; Fuller, 2005; Beaton et al, 2006) and of leadership and change within them is no longer 'just' a debate; understanding and thereby being able to work with multiple institutional webs of complexity is crucial to the development and enhancement of the sector. Traditional, linear, rationalist change programmes can be effective in delivering products, but may not be as effective at delivering sustainable capacity for change – what we call 'change-ability' – across the various inter-linked relationships that characterise higher education institutions (HEIs). Chambers et al. (2007) found that HEIs in the UK have adopted a range of approaches to organisational development and change; they argue that successful organisational development occurs in environments "in which people are more likely to be agile and fleet of foot" and where institutions are "seeded with change agents".



The ability to change perspectives is necessary for organisational development.

Foto: Klaus Uwe Gerhardt/Pixelio

In 2004 the UK's Higher Education Academy and the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education joined forces to shape and sponsor a different kind of change programme for UK HEIs called Change Academy (CA), based on a belief in working with organisational complexity in a sustainable way, in the sense of delivering change in the immediate context, but at the same time building potential for 'change-ability' in individuals, institutions and the sector as a whole. It is a year-long process that includes specific development opportunities for nominated team leaders, an ongoing support network and a four-day residential providing a creative environment in which the whole team can focus on planning and developing strategies for lasting change. It also represents a significant investment from the sponsors and participant institutions. Today, six years later, is there any evidence that complex and sustained change in higher education is supported by Change Academy?

This paper provides a brief response to this question, offering an overview of the process and the nature of institutional change projects supported and then drawing on interviews undertaken over a two-year period by one of the co-founders of the UK Change Academy, Professor Michael Bradford, as well as the authors' syntheses of feedback from each of the programmes.

What does Change Academy stand for?

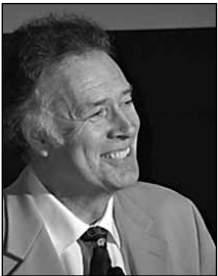
Change Academy's format and content are loosely based on a programme from the American Association of Higher Education (now disbanded) and has continued to evolve since its inception. It has been further adapted by institutions for 'internal' change academies (e.g. Gentle, 2007;



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Dandy, 2009; Oxley/Flint, 2009) and to address specific national agendas (e.g. Change Academy Social Work Scotland). For the UK Change Academy, the sponsoring organisations invite HEIs to submit a written proposal targeting local, strategically important projects. After selection, nominated team leaders meet to reflect on their own self-awareness as leaders and to consider the selection of their team, both crucial CA elements. A 'diagonal slice' is strongly encouraged; that is, a cross-institutional team comprised of people from a range of functions, disciplines, levels and stakeholder groups – including students. Each team of seven or eight people is supported by a member of the CA team who visits the institution and begins to lay foundations for assessment of success. A four-day residential retreat is a key part of the programme. CA does not provide solutions to project problems but gives teams time, space and resources to progress their institutional projects, introducing them to notions of complexity, emergence, creativity, innovation, change and organisational dynamics. A second institutional visit and a final team leaders' meeting offer opportunities for reflection and evaluation.

Core characteristics of the process are: self-knowledge and reflection; dynamics and emergence; iteration, feedback and constructive challenge; inclusivity and openness; self-organisation and creativity. These are reflected in both formal and unstructured parts of the programme. Overall, the aim is to help institutions migrate towards sustainable processes that are more appreciative of and appropriate to the complex nature of their field of activities and to recognise that the emergent nature of complex change requires creative responses. More than 90 institutional teams – over 700 individuals – have participated in Change Academy since 2004.

Evaluating Change Academy

It is important to note that any attempt to evaluate Change Academy's influences has to recognise the difficulties of attributing causes in a complex world and of not knowing what would have happened without the programme. Nonetheless, we have sought to assess CA's impact at four levels: 1st order effects in project outcomes and project process (project); 2nd order effects in participants' approach to change and leadership/team style (individual); 3rd order cascade effects beyond the immediate project, for example in participants' other tasks and responsibilities, wider team work, viral effects caused by CA processes and techniques (team), and 4th order evidence of a changing organisational mindset that acknowledges and works more successfully with complexity and emergent change (institution).

The project is the team's primary focus – at least initially; it provides the overt rationale for participation in CA, based on the institution's project proposal. All projects ultimately seek to enhance the student experience, with some directed at fundamental change in teaching, learning and assessment, others focused on improvements to student services. Projects have also targeted issues of leadership, environmental sustainability, widening participation, radical restructuring of services or faculty, developing research capacity, institutional 'distinctiveness' and graduate attributes. Although, as can be seen in the discussion below, CA can contribute to projects' success, CA's success often translates into projects being redesigned in scope, approach, timeline, and budget: the combination of divergent and convergent thinking helps teams develop a common understanding of what they are trying to achieve – which may not be what was originally articulated in their proposal.

Interviews with participants and their institutional colleagues have made it clear that many institutions would have progressed their projects without Change Academy. However, there were certainly some projects that were crystallised by the opportunity presented by CA and by the bidding process. CA appears to have two main influences on projects: firstly, they can be de-

veloped much more rapidly than if they were part of 'the everyday job'. The 'time and space' offered by the retreat are cited time and again: "getting away is so important" is an oft-repeated phrase amongst interviewees. Secondly, projects are more developed, considered and creative, according to interviewees, compared to the 'normal' formulation of projects in the institution.

The divergent/convergent techniques to which participants are exposed during the retreat are also cited as having a major influence on many projects, providing "encouragement and stimulus to consider the project from a new angle and think 'outside the box'" (2006 participant) and "the divergent/convergent thinking really helped us in moving the project forward" (2009 participant). These and techniques of engagement have been used to widen participation, increase ownership and increase the likelihood of successful implementation, not only of the original project: "World Café has helped us a great deal. ... we embraced the approach in an appreciative enquiry as we attempted to co-create our new corporate plan" (Inst D 1, over a year on). The support and challenge provided by consultants during the retreat can serve as a catalyst for changed thinking: "[consultants] really helped us to think about our project differently".

Some team leaders are initially resistant to including a student in their team, but overwhelmingly those who do – and the students themselves – find it enormously beneficial to the project, as well as individual and team development. As Bradford says, "students are often major agents of change" and can provide new perspectives, "despite the wide experience of staff". This different perspective has often been mentioned in the evaluations of CA as a major positive contribution to the success of the team and the successful implementation of the project.

Bradford reflects that, "there is not a simple answer to a question about the success of projects or initiatives. There have been varied paths. Those projects that involve cultural changes, and many do, are not straightforward ... this non-linearity and complexity means that many projects/initiatives do not fit well with standard project management techniques".

For most participating individuals, CA appears to have had a significant impact on their personal and professional development and their views of change: "... I'd always thought of change as top-down or bottom-up – I was encouraged to think of change as starting from the heart of a complex organisation, and building up to a more persuasive shift in culture" (Inst. D 2, over a year on), and "it has made me aware of the complexity of models of change and the huge range of approaches to facilitating change" (Inst. B 2, over a year on). Other comments reflect upon CA's focus on inclusivity: "The need to share ideas and collect views, work to a common understanding and communicate has all been enhanced by CA" (Inst. A 3, over a year on). Increased levels of confidence in dealing with change and in interactions with colleagues are also regularly reported.

It would be incorrect to give the impression that all participants benefit from CA: within each cohort, there tend to be one or two individuals who do not seem to benefit as much as the majority. Bradford suggests that this may be because "they do not enter fully into the process, or because they do not fit into their team or agree with its methods or direction, or because they think writing post-its or drawing rich pictures is somehow beneath them, or indeed all three of these".

Individuals also reflect on their experiences as team leaders and members and on the impact of CA on teams. Whilst the work of most teams ended after a year or so, many still rated highly their very positive experience at the residential and after. Use of the engagement and creativity techniques from the retreat back in the institution was often cited as an experience that further bonded the original project team. Everyone interviewed valued their team experience and took some of the ideas of working into other teams within their institution, thus contributing to further

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Inhalt:

Die Welt der Hochschulen befindet sich im Wandel. Anpassungsfähigkeit ist ein gefragtes Attribut. Seit sechs Jahren bietet das Programm der Change Academy Institutionen die Gelegenheit durch gemeinsame Teambildungserfahrungen neue Perspektiven und Arbeitsansätze zu gewinnen. Durch Interviews und Evaluationen von Teilnehmern, zu denen in der Regel auch Studenten gehören, wird eine durchaus positive Bilanz des Programms gezogen. Die direkten Vorteile für Arbeitsprojekte seien zwar empirisch schwer zu erfassen, so die Schlussfolgerung; die indirekten und nachhaltigen Vorteile durch neugewonnene Perspektiven lägen jedoch auf der Hand. So eröffnet Change Academy inneren institutionellen Arbeitsstrukturen die Gelegenheit, wandlungs- und anpassungsfähig zu bleiben.

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change within the institution: "I found the world café conversations very illuminating as they brought me into contact with staff that normally I would never meet" (Inst. A, over one year on) and "it has made me think about my role as a manager in the institution and I can create change in the peculiar setting of a university. I was interested in how our team found its way past blockages – this has helped me since" (Inst D 6, a few months on).

Wider Impacts of CA's Programme on Institutions

The influences on institutions may be seen through the projects, the returning teams and individuals, as briefly outlined above, but there have also been wider impacts. In some cases institutions have reported very definite impacts on their approach to change: "the presence of pro-vice-chancellors on the CA teams (and their positive experience) has influenced the vice-chancellor and senior management group in their overarching approach to change especially cultural change. The CA experience resulted in a desire to do things differently and to involve a wider cross-section of staff" (Inst. D 7, not an attending team member, who may have a more objective view of the change).

Five institutions even took up the ideas behind CA and established their own internal change academies, adapting the process to fit their needs. One institution has run five iterations of their CA; an internal evaluation after two concluded that "the programme was achieving its intended immediate outcomes of an increase in participants' change capacity, benefits to team working and institutional networks, enhanced communication about change and customer-focused projects that were starting to have positive impacts on the institution. There was also evidence that participants were beginning to use their insights on other contexts beyond their initial projects". (Dandy, 2009). This is just one example of the cascading process. In other instances, we heard evidence that techniques explored in CA have also been taken up in other areas within institutions, for example into teaching both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, staff development and beyond the university into other parts of the sector. These and other adaptations of the model still appear to retain similar values and processes to the UK CA, and integration of CA processes and concepts in institutions appear to demonstrate its sustainability and capacity for fostering 'change-ability'.

We could add a fifth order to our evaluation framework: that of influences of CA on the higher education sector in the UK. However, this is relatively early and difficult, for all the causal complexities mentioned above. Whilst not fully attributing the following to CA, it does seem from our interviews in particular that there is an increasing awareness of complex change and an appreciation of the potential for more creativity in thinking about change.

Conclusions

We have only been able to give a very brief glimpse of the wealth of qualitative data we have gathered about the influences of Change Academy. In summary however, analysis of those data, indicates that:

- ◆ Most of the individuals have experienced substantial, and sometimes profound, personal and professional development.
- ◆ Teams have bonded well and been energised by the process, and some bridging among teams has occurred.
- ◆ The projects are more rapidly developed and more effectively designed and implemented.
- ◆ In a significant number of cases, CA has influenced how change is approached within the institution.
- ◆ Across the sector, CA has contributed to a greater understanding of cultural change and how that may be facilitated, and improved interactions among institutions.

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