



Report Title

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT AND RECOGNITION

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Creativity Rocks Learning Session that I designed and led with my 20 team members, which helped them develop their creativity muscles!



“Creativity is seeing what others see and thinking what no-one else ever thought.”

By Albert Einstein

Glossary of Terms

DVSA-Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency

DWP-Department for Work and Pensions

DEFFRA-Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

D and I-Diversity and Inclusion

DVLA-Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

DDAT-Digital Data and Technology

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Introduction

Over the last decade, I have embarked on an enjoyable but challenging journey of significant professional work and formal learning. It is important to reflect upon my learning and development. I am still exploring potential research ideas that will benefit both my professional development and my public sector employer, the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency. To fully explore these ideas, I am using this module to reflect on key elements of my professional development over the last five to ten years which provided me with significant opportunities to learn and develop my knowledge and experience, and to identify further research. My chosen learning area is Change Management Through a People Lens. I am a qualified change management professional, and I thrive on leading large, transformational change projects across government organisations. I have learnt that, despite being an organisation's best asset (Zhang-Zhang, YingYing and Varma, 2022), people are often overlooked in change projects. There is a distinct lack of research in this important field; I intend to address this by widening my research knowledge in this area in the future.

I am energised by my continuous professional learning journey. How uneventful would life be, if I could no longer learn. As defined by Moon (2004), "Learning is a process through which experience causes permanent change in knowledge and behaviour." Significantly, learning takes place as a consequence of reflection (Nehyba and Stefanik, 2023), and reflection is commonplace in life, in both formal and informal learning (Fernandez, Chelliah and Halim, 2015). The reflection I have undertaken includes a formal master's in People Management, CIPD Level 7, together with a professional Association for Project Management Group qualification in Change and Project Management. I have, moreover, acquired a wealth of informal and experiential work-based learning, whilst leading multidisciplinary teams of change and improvement professionals to deliver large, transformational change projects across government agencies. Since reflection is considered a mechanism by which thoughts are turned back so that they can be given greater consideration and clarity (Ashny, 2006, Griggs *et al.*, 2018 and Cathro, O'Kane and Gilbertson, 2017), it is relevant for my professional learning. Learning based on experience is frequently classified as experiential learning, as a better means to understand the different ways people learn experientially in order to grow professionally (Ekelin *et al.*, 2021; Ono and Ichii, 2019).

Kolb's (1984) learning cycle is a well-known reflection framework. Having a reflective model helps us to view the event from different perspectives, instead of centring on our own reaction to it (Manolis *et al.*, 2013). Kolb's cycle

saw learning as an active process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Jordi, 2011; Morris, 2020). On the other hand, Gibbs' (1998) model of reflection consists of a description of the situation, feelings, an evaluation of what happened and how it happened, an analysis of why it happened and a conclusion (Ikin, Bunga, Febriani and Syafryadin, 2020; Aneis *et al.*, 2023). Two alternative approaches are Ash and Clayton's (2009) DEAL model and Chamberlain's (2012) Six As model (Paterson and Chapman, 2013). The DEAL model presents a coaching approach, comprising three steps: describing, examining and articulating learning. Furthermore, Edward Cell conceptualised retrospective reflection as a process through which we could overcome distortions in our experiential knowledge (Allsop *et al.*, 2018). Underpinning all of this is the importance of acknowledging that individual learning styles have a significant impact on people's learning (Eny, Erwin and Saiful, 2022; Venna and Kiran, 2024).

A key attribute of reflective practice is its capacity for ongoing purposeful learning in relation to changing and demanding professional work, such as my own in the public sector organisation, DVSA. My employer comprises 4,600 colleagues and millions of customers, aged 17-79. DVSA's overarching vision is to help Britain move safely and sustainably on the roads (Gov.uk, 2023). My role as head of the Business Change and Improvement Directorate involves leading a large directorate of change and people professionals to deliver transformational change that helps the organisation deliver its services better. By writing and talking about my experiences, and considering their historical and cultural context, learning occurs (Lengelle *et al.*, 2013). Finally, reflective practice is particularly relevant to my learning area of Change Management Through a People Lens, as it enables me to detach myself from work-based learning, without completely detaching myself from the practice itself (Dobson, 2022).

Learning Outcome One - Develop and apply an advanced level of communication and influencing skills in order to overcome resistance to change

In order to identify specific occasions that have resulted in my broadening my experience in this area, I intend to reflect on a number of situations. Most recently, I have been involved in a learning activity where I dealt with resistance to change in senior leaders, whilst I led a large change project for DVSA. This was a new area of learning for me and it involved negotiating and influencing upwards to Director grade. Based on Gibbs' model of reflection, I have critiqued my learning in the following way.

Description

I was the senior responsible owner (senior project lead) for leading an organisation-wide service modernisation project for DVSA (Service Led Project). The need for this modernisation came in after COVID, as DVSA's 800 customer services were not fit for purpose in a post-COVID world. This was a risk to both DVSA's reputation and political position across the government.

Whilst leading a meeting with the board of 12 directors to update them on my project's progress, I faced the challenge of them being resistant to this organisational change. This was an area of learning that required me to communicate and influence them all, in order to overcome their resistance to change. There is a distinct lack of research relating to this area, which I intend to explore further. I placed the onus on my learning on Kubler-Ross's (1960) change curve model. It was apparent that the directors were in the 'shock and denial' part of the change curve. Therefore, it was my responsibility to lead them through the change and into the acceptance area, where they felt comfortable with the change (Chavan and Bhattacharya, 2022). There is currently no academic research on Kubler-Ross's change curve being utilised with senior leaders in government organisations; it has even been criticised by scholars for being outdated and based on metaphors of bereavement (Simpson, 2022). I intend to fill this significant research gap, as well as providing an updated framework for managing change which meets the needs of the modern workforce's demanding requirements and heightened pace of change.

Resistance to change is defined as "the degree of behavioural persistence when the environmental conditions that are used to establish the behaviours are altered" (Peng, Nie and Cheng, 2023). I had learnt in my change management studies, according to Cummings, Bridgman and Brown (2016), that consulting, involving and including people in the change is the key to overcoming resistance (Sverdlik and Oreg, 2023). To deal with this challenge, I led a number of meetings with the directors' board, drawing on the knowledge I had acquired during my people management master's studies: that emotional intelligence was the key to building a trusting relationship. I used this skill to assess the room of directors, setting out confidently and clearly what we needed to achieve before explaining my strategy of how we were going to achieve it (Chun-chang *et al.*, 2022). Again, there is limited research on the emotional intelligence of senior leaders in the change profession, in public sector organisations. I intend to further explore this area.

Here, I drew upon my change management learning, where effective communication about the change is considered critical to successful organisational change (Shulga, 2021). I communicated with the directors in a firm but approachable way. I had learnt through my master's degree that leading with transparency and with an authentic leadership approach is the key to building leadership trust (Gardner *et al.*, 2021). Utilising my learning, I was transparent with the problems DVSA was facing, and I offered high-level solutions, pitching communications to their level. I kept verbally reinforcing DVSA's overarching vision and purpose of the work, and I influenced the directors with real-life examples of work I had led in other well-known government organisations.

I had learnt through my experiential real-life learning that there are several constraints linked to people's inclination to resist change (Endrejat *et al.*, 2021). Research findings have identified that people who have personalities that can endure ambiguity, risk aversion and core self-reflection are more likely to respond to change positively (Haesevoets *et al.*, 2022). I got the directors on board using my interpersonal skills, drawing upon my people management learning of engagement as a core approach to getting to know what motivated them (Nikolova, Schaufeli and Notelaers, 2019). Moreover, I used my knowledge of the impacts of a leader's personality and a follower's response to organisational change. Research by Sverdik and Oreg (2023) has shown that those leaders who place emphasis on relationships with their followers are more likely to get a positive response to an organisational change (Lui *et al.*, 2021). I proceeded to lead an interactive, high-level conversation about each of their visions, which had them fully engaged. I also helped them to establish a common theme in their individual area visions, which was improving the service for customers. This meant that they trusted me and no longer resisted the change (Vos and Rupert, 2018). This is an area I intend to research further, specifically in government organisations and with senior leaders.

Feelings

An array of emotions came flooding into my mind. My learning showed me that resistance to change is not consistent among all people; it varies according to each individual's level of dispositional resistance (Burnes, 2015). I contemplated this, drawing upon my diversity and inclusion training. I had learnt both professionally and academically the importance of including everyone (Hagy, 2021; Houston, 2021). Olusanya (2023) stated that organisations with diverse workforces are more innovative, have stronger problem-solving capabilities and are able to attract top talent. Initially I felt frustrated, under pressure, and outnumbered. However, I was quietly confident. The directors were of a higher grade than me, so I influenced

upwards. I had learnt that using a transformational leadership approach increases positive reactions to organisational change (Peng *et al.*, 2021; Bakker *et al.*, 2023). I believed strongly in the vision of the project to improve the service for customers, so I used my acquired learning and belief to focus and fuel my confidence, resilience and drive. I had learnt in my people management studies that leaders with a high level of resilience are capable of reacting in positive ways to challenges they encounter (Elliot, 2020). I reflected on the fact that I had successfully led similar projects in other larger organisations, and the key to the success of this scenario was to ensure that the directors were on the same page. I intend to explore leadership styles and their impact on managing change further in my research.

I used my natural ability to build strong relationships, together with my learning on stakeholder theory, to effectively deal with the situation. Stakeholder theory, as defined by Palmer *et al.* (2010), deals with the concept of how stakeholders should be managed and considered in an organisation's decision-making (Lehtinen, Aaltonen, and Rajala, 2019). Upon reflection, I realised that in order for this change to be successful for the business, I needed to take into account the directors' views and involve them in moulding my plan. Presently, there is very little research on stakeholder theory and government organisations, so I intend to broaden my learning in this area.

Evaluation

This experience was a valuable transformation learning opportunity for me. Mezirow (1991) coined the concept of transformative learning, which means that leaders can increase their effectiveness by developing new models capable of handling new and complex situations (Johnson, 2008). This meant I was able to use my resilience, negotiating and influencing skills to engage the directors and get them on board, using a transformational learning approach. I was able to put my learning into practice and use it as a more effective way of handling this complex situation. It was a positive experience in that I was able to use a variety of learning theories and approaches in a real-life problem. The difficulties were that the directors were not aligned and had different agendas, which made me feel unhappy and frustrated as, initially, they could not see that they all had a common objective, which was improving the service for customers. Kurt Lewin (1947) developed the notion of resistance to change as a complex energy field, where all changes of behaviours could be perceived as a change in some state of the field. It was this model that I used to make sense of the situation (Hussain *et al.*, 2018). It

is my intention to thoroughly research resistance to change among peer-to-peer senior leaders in government.

Analysis

I learnt from this experience that involving the directors was critical to ensuring that changes were implemented as successfully as possible for DVSA. They are a critical stakeholder and a group that I should have engaged, involved and included earlier on in my project, as per Kotter's change management model (Graves *et al.*, 2023). I intend to explore the importance of stakeholder management further in my research. I found that I couldn't compare this situation to any other stakeholder meetings I've had as the directors were of a higher grade than me. I have learnt that finding out what motivates each director helps build engagement and helps me lead the group effectively through change (Ghosh, Sekiguchi and Fujimoto, 2020). I have also learnt that leadership style is critical in leading effective organisational change (Zhang *et al.*, 2022). In conclusion, this learning is very relevant to my future research. It has taught me a valuable lesson regarding stakeholder management and getting the right stakeholders involved at the right stage of a project (Hampel, Tracey and Weber, 2020). This reinforces the notion that people are at the heart of every change, and to fill this apparent research gap, I will continue to build my research knowledge in this area.

Learning Outcome 2 - Select and apply an advanced level of leadership styles whilst leading a large change programme

Description

Making use of Gibb's (1988) model of reflection to frame my learning, another occasion where I have used my learning in my professional practice is when I led a project to improve the culture, behaviour and values in DVSA, by designing and implementing a set of values for the first time, impacting 4,600 people.

The people survey engagement scores for DVSA were low (22%), attrition was high (33%) and there were multiple cases of bullying and harassment. I realised after commissioning an examination of culture in the organisation that there was a lack of trust between leaders and followers, coupled with a lack of understanding of culture. My longer-term strategic decision was to develop a set of values for everyone in DVSA to work toward. I was the senior lead accountable and responsible for this task.

My people management learning has taught me that culture has the greatest influence within organisations and should be prioritised before strategy (Oliver, 2019). Similarly, Peter Drucker famously stated that “culture eats strategy for breakfast” (Willis, 2022; Whitzman, 2016). Interestingly, research has shown that an enriching culture brings multiple positive organisational outcomes, such as increased performance, engagement, teamwork, increased wellbeing and innovation (Morales-Huaman *et al.*, 2023; Zhou, Chen and Lui, 2019; Stiteska and Sein, 2021). The 21st century has placed significant pressure on organisations such as DVSA to transform and keep up with trends such as digitisation. I used this learning on culture to lead the organisation through a challenging period of cultural problems (Burchardt and Maish, 2019). From a research perspective, there is a gap in studies concerning culture in the public sector. I intend to address this gap with my research.

I built a team of 15 senior leaders to help me lead the work. I had learnt through my People Management master’s that visionary leadership is a crucial element in any business in the continually changing territory of today (Ismail, Kertechain and Blaique, 2023; Van der Voet and Steijn, 2021). My goal was to improve the culture of DVSA and I knew that using a visionary leadership style would help me achieve it (Benjamin, 2020; Buss *et al.*, 2023; Cai, Fan and Wang, 2023). I needed the whole organisation to be involved and I had learnt that visionary leadership can shift people’s mindsets towards the collective and encourage them to adopt a collaborative approach for the good of the organisation (Li *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, scholars have debated that visionary leadership is an effective mechanism to inspire followers because it provides them with meaning and purpose (Cheng, 2023; Lui, *et al.*, 2022; Kim *et al.*, 2023). I also knew that using visionary leadership could increase employee creativity, a skill currently desired by complex organisations (Suciu *et al.*, 2023). I set a clear vision and goals, championing how improving our culture would allow us to meet our other organisational objectives and outlining our strategic plan.

In order to deliver the best possible results for DVSA’s people, it was important that I prioritised engagement, hence I led meetings with the 310 corporate senior leaders across DVSA. I used my change management learning to identify them as my critical stakeholder group (Payne, Trumbach and Soharu, 2023). I also reflected on my employee engagement learning; engagement is defined as “employees being able to bring forth their physical, cognitive and emotional energies towards task performance” (Hameduddin and Lee, 2021). Research has illuminated that employee engagement is a mental energy needed for employee innovation (Kwon and Kim, 2020; Bailey, 2022). Employee engagement is also known to be associated with many positive employee behaviours such as positive attitudes, motivational states, happiness at work, organisational pride, organisational commitment and

wellbeing, increased performance and retention of talent (Vera, Sanchez-Cardona, 2023; Raza *et al.*, 2021; Nguyen and Nguyen, 2022; Salem *et al.*, 2023).

I was genuinely interested in what people thought and felt about culture in DVSA. I reflected on my leadership trust learning and how trust is a pivotal element of a leader-follower relationship, and indeed of effective leadership, specifically when managing a large cultural change such as this. Trust is defined as “a readiness of taking risk according to leaders’ measures and expectations of positive outcomes from the leaders’ initiative” (Men, Yue and Lui, 2020). Furthermore, in the context of organisational change, trust guides employees to feel motivated, empowered, and involved with the organisational change activity and in bringing new changes to the organisation (Islam, Furuoka and Idris, 2021). Moreover, trust plays a critical role in decreasing ambiguity and angst in employees in uncertain circumstances such as organisational change (Fischer, Hyder and Walker, 2020; Khan *et al.*, 2020). However, what about the senior leaders and their reaction to change? Although there is significant research about leader-follower relationships, there is limited research on senior leadership to senior leadership peer relationships, or indeed senior leaders to superior senior leaders or ministers. I intend to fill this important theoretical gap with my further research.

I had learnt that leadership plays a fundamental role in managing successful organisational change (Aya *et al.*, 2022; Younas *et al.*, 2021). The leadership-change relationship is one of the most contentious issues of organisational life and scholars have avidly debated which leadership style best supports change (Jing, Nan Nan and Yuan, 2020). Moreover, charismatic leadership – first coined by Max Weber (1864-1920) – is known to increase commitment to change and, more broadly, reduce employee attrition (Yue, 2021; Barton and Mees, 2023). Therefore, I pivoted to a charismatic leadership approach to build up trust with my senior leadership team. I listened, I heard and I passionately drip-fed the strategic benefits of having values. Pivoting once more to a transformational leadership approach, known as a mechanism for uplifting employees for the benefit of the organisation, I set clear directions so that everyone knew what was expected of them (Ho and Astakhova, 2020). Research on transformational leadership has shown that this style is the most successful approach to achieving pragmatic outcomes for organisations in the quickly changing context of business (Cao and Le, 2022; Men, Yue and Liu, 2020). Furthermore, there lies a significant gap in research concerning public sector government organisations.

Over a year, I planned and led many meetings and engaged my team with my expert knowledge in culture and evidential best practices from my people management learning. I influenced the success of this work by clearly

showing my team my commitment and passion in this area and all my dealings with them, giving constant empowering, insightful messages and clear expectations. With my steering, and by pivoting to a coaching leadership style, I effectively led and supported my team. I had learnt Witherspoon's (2014) coaching model, in which coaches are developed to engage leaders in reflecting on and reframing their previous activities, and I used this model in my approach (Patrick *et al.*, 2021). Each of my senior leaders then engaged their teams in developing a set of values. Utilising my change management learning, in this way my people were consulted, involved and included (Shulga, 2021). I gave them the autonomy to mould their own team values, then brought them together to develop an overarching set of values for the organisation, which spoke to everyone, and which were then published on the intranet.

Feelings

I felt energised by this project. I wanted to make a difference and therefore I fully invested. My initial gut reaction to the cultural problems was disappointment and worry that there was such a high level of bullying and harassment in the organisation. I was hopeful that I could improve this. The difficulties I faced were the different working cultures within the organisation – the traditional white-collar and blue-collar working cultures, each struggling to relate to one another's culture. I had to inspire my teams of leaders to engage these different groups in different ways. I could see that a one-size-fits-all approach to change had previously been adopted for DVSA, which was ineffective for the different people in the organisation. A more bespoke approach to change needed to be adopted by DVSA for changes to be successful.

Evaluation

One positive aspect was that I was able to apply my learning on a number of different leadership styles in this project; I discovered I had the ability to pivot to a variety of different styles depending on the situation. I had also learnt through my people management master's and real-life experiential learning that colleagues' behaviour can be deeply moved by leadership styles, either positively or negatively (Yang and Zhang, 2024). It wasn't without its challenges, as the CEO didn't agree that DVSA was at a developmental stage for values. I felt very strongly that I was a subject matter expert in cultural change, through my people management degree and my experience of leading cultural change in a larger organisation, the Department for Work and Pensions. I had learnt that improving DVSA's culture would foster an array of

other benefits for people, such as employee engagement, work satisfaction, and increased wellbeing and performance (Bhaduri, 2019). Furthermore, I had learnt that culture should be aligned at the centre of strategic human resource management practices (Thankur, 2022). To overcome this hurdle, I led many meetings with the CEO, where I pivoted to an authentic leadership approach, allowing us to share how we felt. I had learnt in my master's degree that authentic leadership involves demonstrating your true self to others (Gardner *et al.*, 2021). I was able to convince her by using strong, well-structured arguments, practical examples and academic evidence of my experiential learning. Experiential learning theory, as developed by Kolb (1984), provides a practical model for comprehending how knowledge and experience are connected. If I could have done things differently, I would have involved and applied my employee engagement skills to engage the CEO earlier on in the work. This represents another area of research that I will develop further.

Analysis

In conclusion, this work allowed me to use a variety of learning, both academic and experiential, from leadership styles put into practice, to negotiating and influencing, to resilience. Using a combination of theory and practice, I was able to transform the culture of the organisation by implementing values and devising a three-year strategic plan for DVSA's employees to work towards. The results were immediate, demonstrated by a survey undertaken six months after the values were implemented. Engagement scores improved from 22% to 68% and the number of bullying and harassment complaints reduced from 52% to 15%, which was a significant achievement.

Learning Outcome 3 - Critically research and develop a change and engagement strategy to respond to Civil Service wide priorities.

Description

I was responsible for leading the Digital Data and Technology Capability Programme for DVSA and across government, which was a large public sector initiative. Technologies were developing at exponential rates in the 20th century and DVSA were struggling to keep up with the need to change their business models (Renu, 2021; Laudien *et al.*, 2024). Attrition figures were high (46%) and capability in the digital profession was low (18%). Furthermore, there was a government-wide target set by ministers that DVSA needed to retain 6% of their digital colleagues in-house. I made the strategic

decision to develop a graduate apprenticeship for digital staff. Midway through the project timeframe, ministers widened the scope of the project to include a 20% Diversity and Inclusion target for the apprenticeship. I had learnt through my people management master's that Diversity and Inclusion are vital in the workplace as they help lead to more productive people outcomes, can develop across government innovation and result in an engaged and empowered workforce at all levels (Ammarah, *et al.*, 2022; Dawson, Parker and Okimoto, 2024). Furthermore, I had also learnt that Diversity and Inclusion are critical to a healthy work culture (Buttinger, 2023).

Through my APMG project management learning, I understood how to plan a successful project. Expert planning was fundamental to this project's success and so I referred to my people management master's, namely PESTLE (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental) (Gov.uk, 2024), which is a strategic tool that enables you to assess all the external factors facing a project. From adapting this approach I have developed a wider understanding of the external factors that impact on a project. I brought my learning to life in a real work situation here (CIPD, 2017); I built a team of 25 change professionals to help me lead the work. Through experiential learning in the workplace, I had learnt the benefits of across-boundary working and how it leads to increased capability, motivation and job satisfaction (Ronkko and Herneoja, 2021). Across-boundary working was pivotal in this project; this is how I brought people together from different departments in a large learning network, enabling them to cross-pollinate knowledge, share best practices and identify new ways of working creatively (Boer, Bjork and Rene, 2023). My people management learning had taught me that creativity was the core skill required by organisations presently (World Economic Forum, 2023). I ensured that my teams felt safe to try new approaches, by building trust and strong relationships and implementing creativity sessions (Hackathons), which allowed them to think differently, and be creative and innovative (Byron *et al.*, 2023; Gelaidan, Houtgraaf and Osama, 2022). Currently, there is no research on across-boundary working within and between government public sector organisations. I intend to fill this research gap.

Over my 22-year leadership career, wherein I have led change in government departments, I have developed a proven ability to scan and analyse data, and identify people trends accurately and succinctly. I used this ability and attention-to-detail expertise to assess the complex data on this problem statement and formulate a robust project plan. My real-life experiential learning had taught me how to carry out research and analyse qualitative and quantitative data to make evidence-based decisions in projects that have the best outcomes for business and people (Gray, 2004; Costley, 2010; Grix, 2010).

Moreover, I had learnt – through my work-based learning in government organisations, coupled with my APMG formal change management learning – the importance of communication and engagement plans to ensure that the change is successfully embedded in an organisation. I had further developed this work-based learning by establishing an advanced understanding of the criticality of communicating and engaging when leading organisational change (Taylor, 2014). There is another lack of research in this area, specifically when managing change in public sector organisations, which I intend to study further. My people management master's has shown me that emotions play an integral part in managing change; after all, managing change is about people and placing people at the centre of any change (Helpap and Bekmeier, 2016). Although there is considerable research on the exploration of emotions and labelling emotions, there is limited research on managing senior leadership emotions in response to change (Christmann, Hoffmann and Bleser, 2017). Furthermore, there has been little study into people being placed at the centre of change. This is a critical area that would benefit my professional development.

Furthermore, the learning I have acquired in my people management master's has shown me that managing organisational change is an innovatory, challenging process and that communication is a crucial tool which organisations like DVSA can use to influence employees, including their emotions (Harikkala-Laihinien, 2022). My work-based learning in government organisations has shown that colleagues who do not receive effective communication regarding change from their leader may experience fear, anxiety, frustration and even anger. The role of the leader, within the leader-follower relationship, remains undetermined in research (Musaigwa, 2023). Yet, the limited previous research indicates that communication is vital in creating a culture that embraces change positively (Herrmann and Nadkarni, 2014). I intend to further research the significance of leadership communication during the change process in my study. Finally, I supported my teams in developing robust communication and engagement plans for the digital apprenticeship that appealed to applicants from all backgrounds, which ensured people were heard, seen and valued. This also enabled DVSA to meet the target of retaining 6% of digital staff in-house.

Feelings

This was an invigorating piece of work and learning, as it allowed me to learn more about the government's wider priorities and permitted me to work with ministers and senior leaders of a higher grade. This allowed me to use my established learning on leadership and build on my own personal leadership capability. Reflecting on my learning regarding leadership and innovation, due to the rapid pace of change and technological advancement that DVSA faced,

I realised I needed to innovate and change the current approach to apprenticeships (Alblooshi, Shamsuzzaman and Haridy, 2021). I had also learnt that as a senior leader, I needed to play a pivotal role, as extensive research suggests (Nguyen, Hooi and Avvari, 2023). I felt energised, being able to drive a new apprenticeship initiative that appealed to people of – and attracted talent from – all backgrounds. I had learnt the importance of Diversity and Inclusion from my people management learning and I used it as a key strategy for the project (Otten *et al.*, 2022). My research on Diversity and Inclusion has shown that many companies struggle to implement Diversity and Inclusion strategies (Chidambaran, Liu and Prabhala, 2022). I did not find implementing a strategy challenging in this project; I was excited that I was able to make a difference to people in this way.

Evaluation

This was a positive experience for me, as I was able to put my people management learning to good use on employee engagement, recruitment, and retention to get the best business and people outcomes. My learning has taught me that more engaged colleagues experience more positive emotions (Alagarsamy, Mehrolia and Aranha, 2023). This opportunity has highlighted the importance of colleagues' emotions in managing change and how emotions play a pivotal role in the successful implementation of change (Connor, McDermott and Gillies, 2022). I had learnt that the civil service has great difficulty in attracting, recruiting and retaining people in digital roles from diverse backgrounds. The ministers had highlighted an opportunity, not a challenge, and I have learnt a greater level of tenacity and creativity in that I was able to drive my teams to come up with new ideas to engage applicants for the apprenticeship (Holzle, Boer and Bjork, 2020). I had built a greater understanding of the government's wider goals and built across government networks with people who have enhanced my career moving forward.

Analysis

This work has enabled me to create a strong synergy between people management and change management learning and professional development, which has not been identified in research before. They are so intrinsically linked, yet they are considered separate areas of research and separate professionalisms. I intend to highlight this link in my further research. This was an enlightening opportunity for me to place people at the heart of a project; similarly, my research has highlighted that people are an organisation's best asset (Vrontis *et al.*, 2022). I was able to use multiple areas of expertise and acquired knowledge through my master's programme

and professional learning. There are many theories that I have put into practice in this piece of work, however, I have identified significant gaps in existing knowledge that I intend to fill in with my research, including the importance of including Diversity and Inclusion strategies in work to drive innovation and new perspectives and to encourage a wider mindset. Employee engagement and communicating effectively through change are key drivers for successful change (Kirton and Greene 2019). Moreover, by implementing a digital apprenticeship, I was able to reduce contractor costs for DVSA by one million pounds in the first year. Together with retaining 85 digital professionals in the first year of implementation, my leadership has created significant efficiencies for DVSA, as well as opening up more opportunities for my further research.

Conclusion

In this review, I have explored and reflected my experiential learning as a senior leader and the learning I have acquired from my people management professional qualification (CIPD). I have also reflected on the formal professional learning I have undertaken in my APMG change management qualification, people management qualification and Masters' degree. I have identified a distinct lack of research in several areas of interest, involving my chosen research area change management through a people lens. Nevertheless, my learning so far has provided with rich experiences which has built my capability as a senior leader. I intend to build on my learning and fill those research gaps that lie specifically in the public sector.

Sian Cooper

CV

A creative senior leader with proven experience in senior government operations who is passionate about leading transformational change and continuously improving customer service delivery in the public sector. Strong experience as a qualified Change/Project/Portfolio Manager. Strong evidential history of leading high-profile, large public sector radical change/test and learn programmes, leading thousands of senior leaders, at pace. Vast experience in leading teams to complete challenging multi-year projects. A critical thinker who can inspire and foster inclusivity in teams. Adept at exploring and bridging new and unfolding concepts and practices that respond to the challenges of public sector across government. A proficient high-level workshop designer, who can empower teams to drive and foster creative outcomes, with innovative workshop design. Expert in Continuous Improvement, Lean, Agile/Waterfall methodologies. Highly organised Senior Leader who can balance multiple priorities at pace, to stretching deadlines. Experienced at developing and leading high-performing teams. Ability to lead multiple portfolios at pace, across government. Excels in both written and verbal communications and has a strong ability to interpret and synthesise narrative/data. Enhanced digital capabilities, and strong analytical and stakeholder management skills with stakeholders at all levels. Passionate about my own development and the development of others. Expert in Change Management recently completed master's degree/CIPD Level 7 in People Management, with distinction. Currently completing Professional Doctorate in Change and People Management.

Head of Business Change and Improvement: October 2021-present, Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency

- Currently leading a high-performing and professional Business Change Portfolio and Improvement Directorate of thirty change professionals. Budget Holder for 1 million pounds. Known and headhunted for stakeholder/interpersonal and people management skills to transform an underperforming directorate (CIPD Level 7 qualified/master's level).

- Through strong leadership and relationship skills, I transformed the directorate from being disengaged. Dealt with multiple complex, ambiguous cultural problems, capability problems, conduct and behavioural problems, whilst being accountable for large-scale IT and other projects and programmes that span across 18 different departments.
- Made use of different engagement techniques to drive, develop and transform an underperforming directorate to a valued, driven, enthusiastic team that put people at the heart of change management.
- Responsible for recruitment. Implemented innovative multiskilling approach within teams, which reduced siloed working, built across-government relationships, improved productivity, resulted in better-managed resources, improved capability and built a strong high-performing reputation.
- Senior project lead for a complex across-government HR IT system programme FOSS (Future of Shared Services). Transformed the user experience by 45% for colleagues across eight government departments, including HMRC and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency.

Senior Programme Change Design Lead Department for Work and Pensions, October 2019-October 2021

- Project lead for DWP's ground-breaking new and improved bereavement service, which has provided the benchmark for all other DWP services.
- Led multidisciplinary teams of senior leaders to improve the experience for bereaved Customers, using an experimental service hypothesis which involved the same member of staff dealing with the customer for the whole journey.
- Responsible for designing the new service, driving teams to develop user-focused products which enabled the test success.
- Responsible for owning and managing the risks, issues, dependencies and project escalations.
- Responsible for engaging multidisciplinary teams and resolving complex stakeholder dynamics within them, by leading meetings and providing regular clear communications, utilising my Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous learning.
- Managed multiple priorities at once, using my professional people management learning – such as emotional intelligence, leadership styles and employee engagement – to resolve an identified strategic blocker. Overcoming barriers and inspiring teams to design a new creative learning approach, at pace.
- An excellent communicator, I was responsible for a learning and development plan and all high-level project communications, both verbal and written.

- The new service has set the exemplary benchmark service for the whole of DWP's benefit delivery to customers, improving customer service by 62%.

Change Design Lead Managing DWP's Customer Expectations, May 2018-October 2019

- Led project, using agile and lean methodologies which improved customer user experience across DWP's 29 benefit lines and four access points, including SMS messaging, GOV.UK, telephone messaging and online claim acknowledgement. Redesigning the benefit services/IT platforms and communication products.
- I led the project from the discovery phase to into business as usual, and benefit realisation for the above five areas, across the department, using user-focused design.
- Nominated Lead responsible for the improved content for GOV.UK and communications such as SMS text messages, resulting in an improved user experience for over 20 million DWP customers.
- 55% reduction in progress chasing calls, and improved customer satisfaction by 42%.

April 2000 to September 2019 DWP, various roles including:

Jobcentre Manager

Project Lead for Assisted Services Customer IT rollout, to support Universal Credit full-service implementation, which was implemented nationally at Jobcentres

Customer Service Manager/Finance Manager

Team Leader/Work Coach, Jobcentre

Specialist Decision Maker

Key Skills

- Strong proven expertise/experience in project/portfolio/Change Management, APM and PRINCE2 qualified. Experience in leading high-performing teams.
- Expert Change Management and managing large teams positively and passionately through change, despite drawbacks and negativity from stakeholders. Benefits management experienced/qualified. Excels under pressure.
- Proficient in gathering, interpreting and synthesising user-focused data.

- Critical thinking/attention-to-detail expertise.
- Continuous Improvement expertise in lean/kanban/scrum.
- Experienced and passionate at leading fully inclusive and diverse teams of leaders/subject matter experts. Extensive working-at-pace experience.
- Proficient in developing robust business cases for small, medium and large projects, including long-term complex government programmes and projects.
- Excellent communication both written and verbal to varied audiences, including permanent secretary level, adept at simplifying complex information.
- Building strong internal and external stakeholder relationships, can remain calm under pressure and focused on people and business priorities.
- Change design/user-focused process and product design expertise.
- Proficient people management skills and experience, which enable me to deal with adversity and challenges with ease.
- Experience working with/influencing upwards with Band 1 leaders across government.
- Self-starting leader who is adept at coaching and intuitively recognising leaders' strengths. Has 20 years' experience in managing change and performance in government organisations, and strong multi-benefit service delivery experience.
- Resilient leader, evidenced by currently completing a part-time doctorate and full-time head of business change position.
- Proficient at leading high-profile projects at pace
 - Experienced at project risk management, issue resolution and mitigating risks in a solution-focused way.
- Exemplary digital and research methodology expertise, and MI data analysis expertise.
- Proficient at managing ambiguous stakeholder and senior leadership needs.

Qualifications

A level English Literature

A level Physical Education

A level Art

8 GCSE subjects grade A-C including English and Maths

BA (Hons) degree in Sport and Human Movement

APMG Change and Project Management Professional Qualification

Master's Level educated - CIPD Level 7 in People Management and achieved distinction



Driver & Vehicle
Standards
Agency

**Sian Cooper Head of Business Change and Improvement-Job
description**

Head of Business Change and Improvement	
Grade	7
Location	National – Swansea
Reporting to	Head of People Partnering, Change and Improvement
Directorate	People
Role Purpose	

Head of Business Change and Continuous Improvement is responsible for the effective central oversight of DVSA's change management and continuous improvement activities, ensuring that change is well managed and championing an ethos of continuous improvement.

Responsible for championing a business and people focused Change Management approach across all DVSA, supporting initiative and change as well as supporting the behavioural and cultural development of our organisation.

The post holder is seen as the primary source of change leadership expertise in the business. Contributing to and implementing wider DVSA Change Strategy, encompassing all elements of Business Change, integrating, Behaviour, Capability, Continuous Improvement, Major Step Change.

A critical element of this role is the active development and imparting of Change Management and continuous improvement knowledge and capability to the widest possible audience within the DVSA. The role manages the successful transition of business changes from initiatives and programmes through implementation into operational areas.

As a member of our People leadership team, you will play an integral part of an ambitious and exciting agenda. You will lead the directorate to be progressive and forward thinking. You will make sure that we are an

Main Duties	Activities may include
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Leadership role	You will manage your team of professionals with integrity using engaging, inclusive and respectful leadership qualities, upholding the reputation of the Agency, Department and Civil Service. You will manage the talent in your team by making sure capability and development needs, and aspirations are nurtured and met for the short, medium and long-term. You will create and own a clear vision and direction for your function, making sure people are at the heart of all decision making, and that services are customer focused. You will use this to inform the development of the overall People directorate strategy and business plan for the short, medium and long term. You will work with your fellow People directorate leaders in a joined-up and cohesive way, making sure there is effective strategic planning and communications, avoiding duplication and providing value-for-money. You will work flexibly across functions embedding a culture of teamwork and people focus. You will build strong, engaging, and collaborative relationships across DVSA, the Department, wider Civil Service and external organisations for the good of the People directorate and DVSA and to create a high performing and well-respected Agency. You will execute management responsibilities effectively,
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Expert Role	• Develop and implement a DVSA Change Management and Continuous Improvement Strategy, and have primary responsibility for implementing this in the Agency, while monitoring its effectiveness • Develop, implement, and champion a DVSA framework for how change will be managed, incorporating stakeholder management, internal communications strategy, impact assessment, learning and development requirements and monitoring the benefits. • Develop the change management capability of DVSA managers and lead the change and improvement networks from across each business area. • Engage with relevant stakeholders in the business areas affected by change to discuss the impact of the change and obtain feedback and intelligence. • Manage the transition of change in the business. Working with managers and staff to secure the delivery of new products into the business area. Identifying what changes in processes, procedures and practices are needed to achieve change and deliver the planned benefits from the project. • Work with customers and a wide range of stakeholders to identify and develop the plans for the
Leadership	• Demonstrate leadership by providing guidance to staff to support the delivery of objectives. Manage and engage with honesty and integrity, and upholding the reputation of the Agency, Department and Civil Service. • Work in collaboration with other managers across all functions for the good of DVSA and to create a high performing and well-respected Agency.

Internal and External Relationships	• Liaise with relevant internal departments to ensure that internal and external customer needs are met and that these requirements are fully communicated throughout the business. • Ensure good relations and communications with all members of the team and responding politely and in a timely fashion to internal and external customers. • Communicate with all major stakeholders (internal and external) to achieve business objectives. • Represent the Agency externally, where requested/ required as subject matter expert, (e.g. at networking events, conferences and exhibitions) to enhance and strengthen the Agency's profile. • Maintain an awareness of external factors (including government business initiatives and current and proposed legislation in relation to commercial activities) which impact the business. Communicating such information and any subsequent changes to the
Required Qualifications, Professional Memberships, Experience and Behaviours	
Qualification/ Professional Memberships	APMG Change Management Practitioner or willingness to work towards. Managing Success Programme and/or similar project management delivery qualification.
Skills and	
• Experience in leading and managing change as an active Business Change Manager (or more senior) in either the private or public sector. • Excellent knowledge of change management methodologies and techniques and experience of applying them to a variety of initiatives. • A sound and demonstrable understanding of process review, and re-engineering and continuous Improvement approaches (including Kaizen, Kanban, Lean techniques and methodologies). • Good working knowledge of project management methodologies and governance.	
Any Other Requirements	This role will include some UK travel and occasional overnight

Annotations	• Far reaching role covering whole organisation 4,600 employees, responsible for driving DVSA's change strategy. Successfully led Digital and Data and Technology programme, designing and implementing a graduate digital apprenticeship for the 1st time in DVSA. This reduced 1 million external contractor costs in the first year. I also led the design and implementation of the governance process, that DVSA's senior leaders needed to follow to get a strategic change/ project signed-off. I reduced the steps required in the process from 20 to 6, improving a clunky inefficient process. I improved user experience from 22% to 72%. I also led an improvement programme across 8 government departments, that improved an outdated shared serviced HR system. By driving my teams towards the alignment of key drivers such as digitalisation and automation, I improved the user experience across 8 departments from 12% to 69%. • Solidified my extensive knowledge on leadership, engagement and managing change, by leading on the above pieces of work. This has also sparked my interest to learn more and be the best I can possibly be. • Made use of my learning on culture, specifically around how culture should be prioritised before any other strategy. I improved the culture of the team
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